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**‘Mapping Mission as Translation with Reference to
Michael Polanyi’s Heuristic Philosophy’**

Richard L. Haney

OCMS, PhD

ABSTRACT

My thesis proposes a theological conceptualisation for understanding gospel and culture relationships in the field of Christian mission.

I begin by investigating whether the missiological categories of contextualisation and inculturation are adequate for describing how the Christian gospel is offered from one culture to another. Can the categorical metaphor, ‘translation,’ construed conceptually rather than linguistically, add a more fruitful and comprehensive way of understanding how the Christian message is transmitted across cultures? I contend that ‘mission as translation’ incorporates numerous features of contextualisation and inculturation, yet avoids weaknesses of those two interpretations. The incipient theory of mission as translation has been articulated by mission historians, Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh, and theologian Kwame Bediako. I use reading of key texts of these scholars to build a conceptual approach to mission as translation. I contrast their translation principles with the work of two Roman Catholic missiologists, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter, proponents of mission as contextualisation.

In developing the argument for my thesis, I explore insights gleaned from studying linguistics, hermeneutics and translation studies. I go on to identify three ‘linguistic translation’ features: similarity and difference, transformation, and multiplicity, and then apply Eugene Nida’s communication theory to missional translation. Drawing on heuristic insights from Michael Polanyi, I take Nida’s translation theory further and suggest that relevance theory, interpreted by Ernst-August Gutt, provides a way forward in translation studies. I argue that Polanyi’s notions of discovery and indwelling offer methodological categories to describe how a mission translator pays attention to cultural particulars and integrates them into perceived meaningful patterns. I use Polanyi’s notion of the tacit dimension as the primary hermeneutical tool in understanding mission as translation.

Finally, I test mission as translation by applying it to three case studies and conclude by discussing the three ‘linguistic translation’ features in light of Christian mission.

‘Mapping Mission as Translation with Reference to Michael Polanyi’s Heuristic Philosophy’

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in the University of Middlesex

November 2013

Oxford Centre for Mission Studies

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT ONE

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote.

Other sources are acknowledged by midnotes or footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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DEDICATION

To Pam, my dear wife and a ‘mother and grandmother’ par excellence. Thanks for your patience, counsel, kindness, support, help, love and companionship on this journey.

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABS	American Bible Society
AIC	African Independent (Initiated) Churches
ASM	American Society of Missiology
<i>DR</i>	<i>The Dream of the Rood</i>
<i>EH</i>	Bede's <i>Ecclesiastical History of the English People</i>
<i>ESV</i>	English Standard Version (English Bible)
IAMS	International Association for Mission Studies
<i>IBMR</i>	<i>International Bulletin of Missionary Research</i>
<i>IRM</i>	<i>International Review of Mission</i>
IMC	International Missionary Council
<i>JACT</i>	<i>Journal of African Christian Thought</i>
<i>NRSV</i>	New Revised Standard Version (English Bible)
PK	<i>Personal Knowledge</i> (Polanyi, 1958)
RC	Ruthwell Cross
RT	Relevance Theory
SIL	Summer Institute of Linguistics
SL	source language
ST	source text
<i>TAD</i>	<i>Tradition and Discovery</i> (Polanyi Society journal)
<i>TASOT</i>	<i>Toward a Science of Translating</i> (Nida, 1964)
TL	target language (receptor language)
TT	target text
UBS	United Bible Society
WEA	World Evangelical Alliance
WCC	World Council of Churches

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Locating the Discourse

One of the great Lutheran hymns about Jesus' Passion goes by the German title, 'O Haupt voll Blut und Wunden' and is often rendered in English as 'O Sacred Head, Sore Wounded.' Based on a Latin medieval poem, the text was translated into German by the Lutheran hymn writer Paul Gerhardt. The closing section of the poem lends its verses for the hymn. In the J. Waddell Alexander translation, one of the stanzas begins with a question about language.¹

What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest friend,
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?
O make me Thine forever, and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never outlive my love to Thee.

In an expression of prayerful devotion, the poet seeks after appropriate words and phrases to express thanks to Christ his Saviour. Finding adequate language for prayer is a challenge the apostle Paul describes in Romans 8:26 when he invokes the help of the Holy Spirit and claims: 'Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words.'

Expressions of faith and devotion in hymns, prayers, and creeds may be described as primary religious discourse. Gavin Flood (1999:22-5) distinguishes primary from secondary theological discourse. Primary religious language, according to Flood, concerns talking about or to God and includes texts claiming the authority of divine revelation. Secondary discourse is language about primary discourse, that is, it

¹ The hymn was rendered into English in 1752 by John Gambold (1711–1771), an Anglican clergyman in Oxfordshire. His translation begins, 'O Head so full of bruises.' American Presbyterian minister, J.W. Alexander (1804-1859) offered a second English version in 1830. Alexander's translation, beginning 'O sacred head, now wounded', was widely used in nineteenth and twentieth century hymnals.

comments on scripture; it charts the history of theological debates, the explication of terms and the history of traditions. My thesis, a ‘secondary discourse’ study, explores theological concepts about Christian mission.² I study missiological questions about transferring the Christian gospel from persons and communities to other persons and communities. Such discourse about mission is classified academically as missiology or mission studies, the field of my research and this thesis.

The American Society of Missiology (ASM) offers a brief definition of mission that is included in the standard Preface in each published book in their ASM series.

‘By mission is meant the effort to effect passage over the boundary between faith in Jesus Christ and its absence. In this understanding of mission, the basic functions of Christian proclamation, dialogue, witness, service, worship, liberation, and nurture are of special concern. And in that context questions arise, including, ‘How does the transition from one cultural context to another influence the shape and interaction between these dynamic functions, especially in regard to the cultural and religious plurality that constitutes the global context of Christian life and mission?’ (Skreslet 2012:ix, Thomas 1995:xii)

Lesslie Newbigin says of mission: ‘It is the entire task for which the church is sent into the world’ (Newbigin 1989:121). David Bosch offers ‘an interim definition of mission’ by listing several features of Christian mission. ‘Christian mission gives expression to the dynamic relationship between God and the world, particularly as portrayed in the life of God’s covenant people of Israel and then supremely, in the life, death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth’ (Bosch 1991:9).

In the twentieth century, mission thinkers began to refer to the distinction between God’s mission (*missio Dei*) and mission carried out by the Church (*missio ecclesiae*). The concept of *missio Dei* is associated with the 1952 Willingen Conference of the International Missionary Council (IMC) that articulated the idea that mission derives from the nature of God and is better understood theologically in terms of the doctrine of

² I offer definitions of ‘mission’, ‘missiology’, and ‘mission studies’ on pp 4-7. I use the term ‘missional’ generally as meaning ‘having to do with mission.’ ‘Missional’ does have a connotation associated with the gospel and culture movements that study the implication of Lesslie Newbigin’s gospel and culture theologising. Bryan Stone refers to this sensibility as ‘the ecclesial construal of mission’ and cites John Howard Yoder who refers to the Christian community in which the walls are broken down as itself ‘gospel’ and ‘mission.’ Cf. Stone 2010:108-9.

God rather than as a dimension of ecclesiology. Bosch restates the notion succinctly as: ‘God the Father sending the Son, and God the Father and the Son sending the Spirit was expanded to include yet another movement: Father, Son and Holy Spirit sending the church into the world’ (1991:390).

In the Roman Catholic world, a similar emphasis is promulgated by John Paul II in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, which expresses the theological basis for mission in modern times as ‘the self-communication and the self-giving of God to humans.’ God sends forth the Word who became Christ and the power of the Spirit in various human situations.³ The Church is ‘the first and most blessed beneficiary’ of God’s self-giving; the Church is assisted by the Spirit to be ‘a sign and a sacrament’ of all God has done for people (Oboriji 2006:8). Both Bosch and Oboriji highlight evangelisation, the process of spreading the gospel by proclamation and witness, as a key dimension of mission, but understand that evangelisation is not synonymous with mission (Bosch 1991:409ff; Oboriji 2006:4-14). Evangelism, the activities involved in spreading the gospel, is a part of the whole; the whole is called mission.

Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder note that mission is difficult to define but they go on to say that ‘mission takes the church beyond itself into history, into culture, into people’s lives, beckoning it constantly to cross frontiers.’ They cite J. Blauw, who speaks of mission as ‘a boundary notion which indicates that Christ’s dominion knows no geographical boundaries either’ (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:8, 400, n.7).

‘Missiology’ is a term that denotes the academic study of Christian mission; it has at least two dimensions. Andrew Walls indicates that missiology refers to (1) theological reflection on Christian mission--also known as theology of mission or theory of mission and (2) the systematic study of all aspects of mission (an English equivalent of the

³ T. Stransky observes that Roman Catholics and the Orthodox welcomed the *missio Dei* terminology because the Trinitarian emphasis could offset what they perceived in much Protestant thinking as a kind of Christomonism. Furthermore, understanding the church as a sacrament tends to mitigate the dichotomy of God-sending versus church-sending. Cf. Stransky 2002:781.

German *Missionswissenschaft*). Walls explains that this second understanding refers to a distinct academic discipline for some but to others, it represents an application of various disciplines (exegetical, theological, anthropological, historical and more) to that subject called mission.⁴ This second view sometimes is described as ‘mission studies’ rather than missiology (Walls 2002c:781).⁵ The two senses overlap in the typology proposed by Jan Jongeneel that divides missiology into three domains: ‘philosophy of mission’ (*Missionsphilosophie*), ‘science of mission’ (*Missionswissenschaft*) and ‘theology of mission’ (*Missionstheologie*). The ‘mission studies’ view closely resembles Jongeneel’s concept of ‘science of mission’ that he identifies as the empirical study of mission (Jongeneel 1995:71-86). James Scherer, in a 1987 essay, contends that missiology is interdisciplinary because it is properly part of theology and also draws upon the social sciences (Scherer 1994:173-87).

Stanley Skreslet (*Comprehending Mission*, 2012) discusses missiology as a field of study encompassing a broad range of contemporary research that goes beyond theological categories. This wide understanding of the discipline leads him to recognise three habits that belong to the ‘community of practice’ of missiologists. These scholarly habits include: interest in processes of religious change, respect for the reality of faith, and the pursuit of an integrative multidisciplinary approach. Skreslet declares that ‘missiology properly encompasses every kind of scholarly inquiry performed on the subject of mission without necessarily subordinating any group of studies to any other’

⁴ Although Walls refers to the ‘application of disciplines to the subject matter of mission’, it might be more helpful to think methodologically of the application of ‘disciplinary methods’ practiced by historians, theologians, sociologists, anthropologists and others.

⁵ The emergence of missiology as a discipline is usually traced to Alexander Duff’s appointment to a chair at New College, Edinburgh in 1867. This academic pursuit flourished in Europe under the pioneering work of Gustav Warneck (Halle) who published in 1874 the first missiological journal, *Allgemeine Missions-Zeitschrift*. The first Roman Catholic professor of ‘mission science’ was J. Schmidlin at Munster in 1910. One of the first mission academics in the United States was K. S. Latourette who introduced missiology into his teaching of church history at Yale (1937-45). Walls briefly cites subsequent developments in missiology and mentions the 1910 World Missionary Conference, the journals *IRM* and *Moslem (Muslim)*, bases for mission scholarship (Rome, Selly Oak, Yale, New York, Edinburgh), and mission societies including ASM and IAMS (Walls 2002c:782). See also Jongeneel (1995:1-98) whose discussion of terms regarding mission studies includes a detailed historical overview of the development of missiology as a discipline. Cf. L. Pachau (2000:539-55) for a helpful survey of missiology and the study of mission in theological education.

(Skreslet 2012:15). In the January 2014 issue of *IBMR*, featuring the theme of research methodologies in mission studies, several scholars take issue with Skreslet's expansive multi-disciplinary approach.⁶ Craig Van Gelder argues for an emphasis on missionary ecclesiology (the importance of congregations) and mission theology. Dwight Baker echoes the concern to keep mission studies grounded in theology and missional practices. Baker suggests that 'missiology' be used to describe the Church's trajectory that holds mission to be concerned with the claims of Christ and the role of the missionary and that 'mission studies' be understood as referring to a more diffuse range of subjects that extends to include anthropology, ecumenics, intercultural studies and more.⁷

I find myself in substantial agreement with Skreslet and Walls in preferring a wider view of mission studies that makes use of multiple methodologies. 'Mission studies' is an intercultural enterprise, a historical discipline and for some a theological endeavour as well. Theologians and exegetes retain the responsibility to do prescriptive work that guides churches and trains missionary candidates. The empirical studies that comprise the 'science of mission', however, serve two 'publics' or two audiences: the church and the academy. Mika Vähäkangas explains that the demise of Christendom and the growing challenges to Christianity in the west combine to dislodge missiology as the province of theologians positively disposed to mission. On the other hand, Vähäkangas sees the welcome possibility of increasing diversification for missiology

⁶ The January 2014 issue of *Missiology*, on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the ASM, also features articles on the state of the discipline. Dana Robert's essay on the history of the ASM is published in this issue and abridged in the *IBMR* issue. Ross Langmead argues for missiology as an inter-disciplinary enterprise and as a part of practical theology in the curriculum of theological education (Langmead 2014:67-79).

⁷ The related terms, 'missiology' and 'mission studies,' also may signal a divide between North American and European scholarship. Perhaps it is not accidental that *Missiology* is the title of a leading American journal devoted to mission topics and that *Mission Studies*, though international in scope, originated with a mostly European cast and is published in the Netherlands. Cf. Anderson 2012:1-9, 22. Perhaps mission studies in the European theatre resembles religious studies in universities that bring many disciplines to bear upon mission practice and mission history yet do so apart from any required faith commitments.

and the possibility that some subdisciplines will develop into independent ones (Vähäkangas 2010:220).⁸

The recognition that Christianity in the world has undergone rapid demographic reconfigurations has given rise to a new discipline related to mission studies, namely, studies in ‘world Christianity’.⁹ Namsoon Kang points to 2006 when a ‘World Christianity Group’ was formed at the AAR (American Academy of Religion). She comments that some scholars use the alternate term ‘global Christianity’ although both terms are somewhat loosely defined because this is an emerging discipline.¹⁰ Dale Irvin offers this definition: ‘World Christianity as an independent field of study focuses on “Asian, African and Latin American” faith experiences, which have been “under-represented and marginalised” in the past in mainstream Christianity’ (Kang 2010:32-36).¹¹ Andrew Walls claims that Christianity has always been global in principle and in the twenty-first century, it is global in practice once again (Walls 2010b:18). Mark Noll and others point to the research of the late David Barrett and his colleagues that chart the shifting contours of global faith and global practice.¹²

⁸ In Chapter Three I indicate that ‘translation studies’, once a subdiscipline of ‘linguistics’, has emerged as a discipline in its own right. Cf. Snell-Hornby 2006:5-46.

⁹ Kim and Kim (2007) discuss ‘World Christianity’ under the title of ‘Christianity as a World Religion.’ They contend that the phrase, ‘World Christianity’, ought not to be limited to expressions of non-Western Christianity but properly include Europe and North America. Dana Robert (2009) represents the same perspective. I agree with this wide-angle view.

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh argues for ‘world Christianity’ as a term that represents a Christian movement into new regions and cultures, whereas ‘global Christianity’ refers to a replication of Christendom forms developed in Europe. Sanneh claims that the rubric, ‘world Christianity,’ is an attempt ‘to recognize and honor local initiative and agency without the onus of partisan cultural categorization’ (Sanneh 2003:1-93; 2011:92). Philip Jenkins (Jenkins 2002), however, uses global Christianity as the term of choice in his widely read work, *The Next Christendom*.

¹¹ Kang’s article is a useful survey of the two terms and her warning that the ‘rhetoric of world Christianity’ represents a binary configuration of ‘the west and the rest’ recalls Edward Said’s argument in *Orientalism* (1978). Cf. Kang 2010:35-46. See also *Global Christianity: Contested Claims* (Wijsen and Schreiter 2007), *The New Shape of World Christianity* (Noll 2009), *Christianity as a World Religion* (Kim and Kim 2008), *Introducing World Christianity* (Farhadian 2012), *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion* (Robert 2009), and *Mission after Christendom* (Kalu, Vethanayagamony and Chia 2010). Dana Robert gives credit to Henry van Dusen for being one of the earliest advocates of the idea and rubric of ‘world Christianity.’ Van Dusen’s 1947 volume is titled *World Christianity: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Robert 2011:148-52).

¹² See Noll 2010:22-25. Cf. the *World Christian Encyclopedia* (Barrett et al, 2001) and the annual statistical updates in the *IBMR* plus *The Atlas of Global Christianity 1910-2010* (Johnson and Ross, 2009). See Dana Robert’s article about global Christianity’s southward shift (Robert 2000:50).

Terms and categories are important for both primary and secondary religious discourse. I am interested in how persons talk about religious ideas and communicate religious messages. Particularly, I wish to contribute to the missiological discussion about the insertion of the Christian gospel into various and diverse settings across boundaries of space and time. Writing discourse about religion or missiology that is comprehensive and definitive is no small task. I discovered three particular challenges.¹³

One challenge of writing Christian mission discourse is its complexity. The subject of religious studies encompasses a complex set of components, ranging from a religion's history and tradition to its teachings, beliefs, doctrines, and practices. The dynamic range marking a religion's influence and interactions within a culture falls within this domain. A religion and that religion's worldview are complicated subjects and include many sub disciplines.

The perspective of any observer necessarily limits that observer's ability to describe and analyse a religion. This is another challenge of studying Christian mission. Every observer sees from one or several points of view, but no observer can see a religion, or any topic, from all angles. If the researcher is an adherent and participant within a particular religious tradition, the advantage of knowing the beliefs and practices reflexively must be set alongside any perceived disadvantage of not being able to stand outside the tradition in order to achieve an outside, or 'big picture', perspective. If an observer is an outsider, however, the so-called objective point of view lacks the insider advantage of knowing beliefs, practices, and history first hand.¹⁴

¹³ Although I locate my thesis research in Christian mission studies, I acknowledge that this 'Christian' subject also could be considered as belonging to an even broader subject called religious studies. Gavin Flood argues that the term 'religion' is 'an emic, Western category, that originated in late antiquity and developed within Christianity as part of that tradition's self-understanding.' He acknowledges other influences, namely south-Asian traditions that help him define religions to be 'value-laden narratives and behaviors that bind people to their objectives, to each other, and to non-empirical claims and beings' (Flood 1999:4, 44, 240-41). Flood credits Ninian Smart and Oliver Davies for their influence upon his thinking.

¹⁴ Russell T. McCutcheon (1999:1-12) has edited an anthology of 28 readings about the insider/outsider problem in the study of religion. He claims, 'An insider approach is one that examines a particular

A third challenge in contributing to religious discourse is the proliferation of religious communities. Religious traditions are dynamic; some religions expand and extend through the vehicle of missionary activity. Both Protestants and Roman Catholics have contended that the Christian tradition is missionary in nature and is committed to persuading outsiders or unbelievers to become insiders and believers.¹⁵ Twenty-first century Christianity has become a global phenomenon as the result of ongoing missionary encounters and the proliferation of indigenous Christian communities spanning both centuries and continents. David Barrett and others chart what Mark Noll terms the ‘contemporary multiplicity of world Christianity [revealed] in a rainbow of variations throughout the world (Noll 2009:19-26).¹⁶ Missiological discourse about Christianity in the twenty-first century must account for the global phenomenon of variegated expressions of Christian faith in addition to its inherent complexity and the perspectives of its observers.

Particular discourse about Christian mission, therefore, must take account of these three subjects: complexity, perspective, and globalisation. Recognizing these challenges leads to an understanding of mission studies as manifestly interdisciplinary.¹⁷ Charting the history of mission calls for historians. Understanding the cultural particularities of people groups beckons anthropologists and sociologists to join the conversation. Studying the biblical witness about mission invites reflections from theologians and

religion by a practitioner or advocate - an insider - of that religion. An outsider approach is one undertaken by a "neutral" observer. The former values greater insight, and the latter greater objectivity.’

¹⁵ The Second Vatican Council affirms that ‘the pilgrim church is missionary by its very nature’ (Decree on the Church’s Mission Activity, *Ad Gentes*, 2) in N. Thomas 1995:89. Andrew Walls declares, ‘Christian faith is missionary both in its essence and in its history’ (Walls 1996:255). Stephen Bevans comments, ‘Faith is not a personal possession, but something to be shared’ and he links this notion to Walls’ reference to the ‘sending idea’ from which the word ‘missionary’ is derived (Bevans 2011:129).

¹⁶ See the table, ‘Status of Global Mission, 2014, in the Context of AD 1800-2025’ compiled by Todd M. Johnson and Peter F. Crossing and published in *IBMR* 38/1, January 2014. The annual table is published every January in *IBMR* and presents an update on the most significant global and regional statistics compiled in the *World Christian Database*.

¹⁷ See my earlier discussion of mission studies as inter-disciplinary (pp 6-8). See also Langmead (2014:76) who goes so far as to describe missiology as a ‘field of knowledge’ rather than a discipline ‘because it is so closely intertwined with other disciplines.’

exegetes. Understanding languages calls for linguists, while studying the ideas and plausibility structures of a given age makes room for the philosopher.

1.2 Research Aims and Argument

My principal research aim is to study the benefits of using a particular category for discussing the hermeneutical dimension of mission, namely, ‘translation.’ I acknowledge that many scholars study this dimension of mission categorically described as contextualisation or inculturation.¹⁸ By hermeneutical dimension of mission, I mean the tasks involved in interpreting the salient features of the Christian faith or ‘the gospel’ across various boundaries of culture, geography, and time. Hermeneutics describes the discipline of interpretation often associated with the study of texts, but in my research, I use the term in a more general sense. I am especially interested in the particularities of cross-cultural communications of the gospel. How does the missionary¹⁹ understand a source’s religious message, assimilate that message in his or her own life and context, and transfer the message to another person or community?

In the enterprise of Christian mission, the challenges of complexity, perspective, and globalisation must be negotiated in order to communicate the Christian gospel across cultural boundaries to receptor audiences. In the field of mission studies, how does the mission scholar reflect thoughtfully about the process of transmitting this gospel into

¹⁸ William Smalley surveyed mission study dissertations written in English from 1982-1991. He discovered that one third of the 512 dissertations he reviewed focused on liberation theology, indigenous theologies, or issues of contextualization, compared to 3 per cent of missiological theses devoted to the same themes between 1945 and 1981 (Smalley 1993:97-100).

¹⁹ I use the term ‘missionary’ to refer to the agent that is engaged in translation. The terms, missionary or missionary, mean literally a ‘sent one’ or a messenger who brings good news into a new setting. The translator, however, may be an outsider or may be an insider, transmitting good news from one generation to another, or from one neighbor to another. A more inclusive term for a gospel translator is witness. I use ‘missionary’ because it retains a linkage to the enterprise of mission; I do not choose to use ‘missionary’ because it carries stronger overtones of Western mission history and associations with colonialism.

new settings? What is the pattern of interactions between the outside missionary agent and the indigenous receptor community? What terms and categories shall the mission theologian employ to engage in this missiological discourse? Mission thinkers, practitioners and local theologians²⁰ are engaged in an on-going discussion that considers these questions from diverse perspectives, with the number of global voices constantly growing in number and influence.

My working hypothesis, reinforced by the witness of history, assumes a universal accessibility to hearing and embracing the gospel.²¹ I then begin by investigating whether the missiological categories of contextualisation and inculturation are adequate for describing how the Christian gospel is transmitted from one culture or context to another.²² In particular I investigate the scholarship of leading contextual theologians, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter, in order to understand the usages of contextualisation and inculturation. I test the categorical metaphor, ‘translation,’ construed conceptually rather than linguistically, to determine if it adds a more comprehensive way of understanding how the Christian message is transmitted across cultures. Then I will build an understanding of ‘mission as translation’ that incorporates numerous features of contextualisation and inculturation, yet avoids weaknesses of those two interpretations.

²⁰ Robert Schreiter introduces the term, ‘local theologies’, as an English language phrase that highlights the overtone of the local church and safeguards ‘contextual’ for referring to theologies that show sensitivity to the context and avoids coining a new neologism (Schreiter 1985:6).

²¹ In Romans 1:19-21, the apostle Paul declares that all humankind has a knowledge of God’s power visible through the expression of God’s created order. Acts 1:8 articulates a promise delivered from Jesus to his Eleven disciples (named in v 13) regarding the Holy Spirit’s power available for their work of witness ‘to the ends of the earth.’ Acts 2 describes the Day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke or were heard enabled by the Holy Spirit in many languages the good news of ‘God’s deeds of power’ (Acts 2:1-13).

²² I define these terms and chart their history in Chapter Two. I compare these categories to ‘translation’ as a category preliminarily in chapter two and more extensively in chapter 4. I use ‘culture’ and ‘context’ interchangeably because I agree with D. Bosch that culture is an ‘all-embracing reality’ (Bosch 1991:454) but I also note S. Bevans’ expanded sense of context as pointing ‘beyond culture and place to include social location and social change’ (Bevans 2009:167).

I recognise also that mission scholars may use the terms contextualisation and inculturation²³ and seek to find a middle way that is close to mine, for example, Paul Hiebert, Charles Taber, and Darrel Whiteman.²⁴ Many of those who study mission use these terms reflexively since much of the discourse is conducted intramurally among those in the missiology academy. In making a case for ‘translation’, I argue that my mapping goes beyond what Stephen Bevans says about translation in his ‘translation model’, one of several models of contextual theology.²⁵

Bevans claims that practitioners of this translation model use a method of discerning the essence of the gospel, then clothing it with new trappings from the receiving culture. Bevans argues that this model insists on the message of the gospel as an unchanging message. Bevans would argue that in this translation model, the translator understands revelation as propositional, as a message to be adapted to a new context.²⁶ Bevans offers Pope John Paul II, American Evangelicals, Charles Kraft and David Hesselgrave, and others as exemplars of this translation model (Bevans 2009:171-4).²⁷ Bevans and Schreiter also critique the translation model for what Bevans regards as a naïve view of culture and for what Schreiter terms ‘a positivist view of culture’ (Schreiter 1985:8). Schreiter’s emphasis on local theologies represents an additional critique of translation regarding the missional priority of indigenous agency (Schreiter 1985).

²³ *Inculturation* is sometimes spelled as *enculturation*. I explain the distinctions between these two terms in Chapter Two,

²⁴ Titles by Hiebert (2009), Taber (1991) and Whiteman (1997) are listed in the bibliography.

²⁵ Bevans’s book on contextual models was first published in 1992 and a revised edition appeared in 2002. In an earlier work (1985), Robert Schreiter describes local theologies as representing translation models, adaptation models, or contextual models. The translation model is linked to Charles Kraft and his dynamic equivalence view. In a 1983 article, Krikor Habelian identifies two models of contextualisation: Kraft’s ‘translation’ model and Schreiter’s ‘semiotics’ model. Habelian, Schreiter, and Bevans are in substantial agreement in their attempts to describe a translation model.

²⁶ Bevans argues that revelation is not just a message from God or a list of doctrinal propositions. He contends for understanding revelation as a manifestation of God’s presence and regards the Bible primarily as a record of that manifesting presence at particular times and places, namely, Israel and the early Church. (Bevans 2002:44)

²⁷ Bevans does not mention of Walls or Sanneh in his *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002). Because he does not interact particularly with Walls and Sanneh, I contend that some nuances in the ideas of Walls and his colleagues do not fit the ‘translation model of contextual theology’ as Bevans has constructed it. In his 2009 book, *Theology in Global Perspective*, Bevans suggests Walls might belong to the anthropological model. My view is that he has misinterpreted Walls on this matter.

Writing from his perspective as an Asian theologian and a Roman Catholic, Peter Phan declares: ‘First, the most urgent and controversial issue in mission for decades to come will be inculturation as the Catholic church is increasingly becoming a world church’ (2003:xii). What Phan asserts for Roman Catholics applies equally to scholars and church leaders from Protestant, Orthodox, and Independent traditions. Brian Stanley, a British Protestant, writes,

It is not surprising, therefore, that inculturation has become one of the most prominent themes of the Asian, African, Pacific and Latin American theologies that are now so much a feature of world Christianity. The quest for inculturation is a quest for a secure and integrated identity, motivated by a concern to find ways of being both authentically Christian and Chinese, Indian or African, or whatever. (2008:41)

American anthropologist and missiologist, Paul Hiebert explains,

Contextualization is an important and valuable process, necessary to the communication of the gospel ... Contextualization of the gospel in local cultures began with using local languages, translating the Bible, and using local worship forms. There is an increasing awareness that evangelistic methods, too, need to be contextualized. And, questions arise about the contextualization of theology. (2009:26, 180)

These assertions by mission thinkers regarding inculturation and contextualisation signal the importance of critical reflection upon the many dimensions of gospel transmission and gospel reception occurring among the world’s myriad peoples.²⁸ The future of missiology and mission practice will require an ongoing engagement and reengagement with newly emerging and future mission contexts. Lamin Sanneh, invoking the category of ‘translation,’ claims that Christianity is recognisable only in the ‘the embodied idioms and values of the cultures in which we find it...’ He contends further, that Christianity as a distinctive religion ‘is in principle invested without prejudice or favoritism in the distinctions of national life, and not in spite of those distinctions’ (Sanneh 2012a:35-6).

²⁸ Skreslet discusses ‘gospel and culture’ engagement in a chapter on theology, mission, and culture using contextualisation as the major heading and intercultural theology as a secondary one (Skreslet 2012:60-9). Bosch’s enumeration of elements belonging to his emerging ecumenical missionary paradigm includes ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’ alongside ‘liberation’ as three of his thirteen elements--thus highlighting these terms for discussing the hermeneutical dimension of mission.

In order to explore questions about how the gospel is inculturated or contextualised, I will turn to the writings of historian Andrew Walls, who discusses these themes under the alternative banner of ‘translation.’ Historian Lamin Sanneh and theologian Kwame Bediako also invoke the metaphors of translation and ‘translatability’ to discuss how various peoples’ appropriate Christian faith. I find in the published research of these scholars a considerable overlap and agreement. My working hypothesis, then, is that together the ideas of these scholars represent an incipient theology of mission as translation. I do not go so far to describe these three scholars as a ‘school of mission’ because the interdependence among them is asymmetrical, I do find that their work gives evidence of mutual influence. I see Andrew Walls as the primary spokesman for mission as translation. I regard Lamin Sanneh as somewhat secondary but important in his own right. I view Bediako as essentially a disciple of Walls. His work is important because, despite his western schooling, he returned to his African context for ongoing academic research and writing. I will explore their findings and assess their contributions and their interdependence in Chapter Four.

I have discerned clues about translation in the epistemological works of Michael Polanyi, who turned from a career in physical chemistry to probe social and philosophical matters. Polanyi was a critical realist who believed in a material universe, a transcendent deity, and truths waiting to be discovered by intrepid and imaginative scientist-explorers. The missionary seeking to carry the gospel into new places also confronts undiscovered worlds; those worlds can receive and incarnate the Christian gospel. Missioners and local theologians travel a road to present the gospel to be heard, interpreted, and applied in places where it has been neither discovered nor understood. Polanyi’s heuristic insights have the power to inform any odyssey of discovery by

offering guidance to the missionary's quest.²⁹ Moreover, Polanyi locates the quest for knowledge and truth related to discovery as belonging to his framework of personal human knowing (1958:294). He acknowledges the importance of learning with and from colleagues in the pursuit of scientific discoveries.³⁰ Polanyi's epistemology argues against the so-called divide between faith and knowledge. Knowing, according to Polanyi, depends on faith assumptions. Newbigin acknowledges that this is risky business:

Knowing things as they are is not something that happens automatically or that can be guaranteed against failure ... at every stage there has to be a personal commitment to probe and explore, at every stage we have to rely on tools, instruments, which we have to trust while we use them. (1989:35)

I turn to Polanyi for particular insights on epistemology rather than his critique of Enlightenment assumptions and his arguments against scientism. I make use of Polanyi's thought in a way that appreciates Lesslie Newbigin's insights but takes Polanyi's epistemology and applies it in an entirely different dimension. Polanyi's theory of knowing offers his readers a mindset and provides language and categories useful for doing missional translation. He shows the translator how to pay attention, how to attend from one or more subsidiary elements to a focal entity, how to evaluate and validate knowledge claims, and how to integrate particulars into patterns. Polanyi draws insights from Gestalt psychology and Henri Poincare's 'four stages of discovery' that emphasise discovery through perceiving patterns, recognising shapes, selecting a 'good problem' to solve and verification (1946:33, 1966b:86).³¹

²⁹ Polanyi uses the term 'mathematical heuristics' in *Personal Knowledge* (1958) to describe the process of discovery in mathematics. The word is derived from *heuristo*, a Greek word meaning 'to discover'. A heuristic endeavor is a combination of 'active and passive stages' in attempt to discover something that is hidden or to discover the solution to a problem. Cf. Polanyi 1958:124-30, 300-03.

³⁰ Polanyi uses the term 'conviviality' to highlight the importance of collegial fellowship and mutual interactions among scientists. See Polanyi 1958:210-11.

³¹ Polanyi distinguishes between 'verification', by which he means demonstration in mathematics or experimental science, and 'validation', which indicates testing and acceptance in subjects that are not strictly scientific. Polanyi asserts, 'But both verification and validation are everywhere an acknowledgement of a commitment: they claim the presence of a something real and external to the speaker.' (1958:201-202)

Polanyi's notion of tacit knowing offers the missionary a creative way of thinking and talking about the process of transferring the gospel to persons. Polanyi's personal knowing emphasises guesses, hunches, intuition, subsidiaries, and particulars apprehended by a personal agent indwelling both a body and a cultural setting. Knowing is a kind of indwelling, according to Polanyi, where persons utilise a framework for pursuing meaning, which begins with the body but can be extended by using a tool or probe to explore one's environment (1974:148). One intriguing aspect of Polanyi's schema is the perceived relationship between an envisioned whole and the component parts of that whole. Polanyi claims:

There must be a sufficient foreknowledge of the whole solution to guide conjecture with reasonable probability in making the right choice at each consecutive stage. The process resembles the creation of a work of art which is firmly guided by a fundamental vision of the final whole, even though that whole can be definitely conceived only in terms of its yet undiscovered particulars. (1946:31-32)

How might this way of thinking, which relies on a vision of the whole and an integration of clues, apply to an apprehension of the Christian gospel that includes narrative, beliefs, practices, and worldview? In Polanyian terms, the missionary needs a 'fundamental vision of the final whole' in working to interpret this gospel in terms that belong to a receiving community. In applying Polanyi's ideas, I posit that the missionary works with an idea of the gospel's 'essential continuity' or the gospel's 'constants' that function as an envisioned big picture. Reasoning from one aspect of the gospel to the whole, like creating a work of art, demands that the artist, who knows what a subject (such as a face or landscape, or the gospel) looks like, reproduces with paint or words a replica of that known entity. The painting, or patterned gospel, will be a new creation but will resemble the subject in a manner according to the vision of the artist.

1.3 Research Questions and Mapping

A map helps the explorer by charting a course and acting as a guide for a journey. A map shows not only how to plan a trip; it also supplies the larger picture within which the road or path exists.³² Bosch employs a mapping metaphor in referring to his theological approach that utilises a paradigm theory inspired by Thomas Kuhn and Hans Küng.

I realise that my theological approach is a ‘map’, and that a map is never the actual territory. Although I believe that my map is the best, I accept that there are other types of maps and also that, at least in theory, one of those may be better than mine since I can only know in part. (Bosch 1991:187)

Like Bosch, I see the metaphor of a map as useful to describe a mental construct that seeks understanding in terms of a way or a journey. A discovery-journey poses research questions and seeks answers or explanations. In this study, I posit that drawing a map is useful to explain the various ways Christian witnesses describe their missionary enterprises. There are alternative maps in use—that is, other ways are followed to cover the same ground; alternative routes may be travelled. The metaphors of contextualisation and inculturation currently function as constructs for understanding the missional efforts to interpret the Christian gospel in various cultures or contexts.

Scott Moreau also invokes mapping as a metaphor in his book on contextualisation models, defining ‘map’ as a mental construct. He asserts that

No matter how complex, maps are always less complex than our real world. In creating maps, we filter out some things and emphasize others—depending on the choices we make. Every map reduces clutter but simultaneously reduces richness; it simplifies at the risk of reductionism. (Moreau 2012:22)³³

³² Historians report that the pioneer missionary William Carey (1761-1834) originally was inspired to think of mission ventures by reading the accounts of exploration and mapping by the discoverer, Captain James Cook (George 1991:20-21; Drewery 1981:24, 45). Cook was a British pioneer who commanded three expeditions to the South Pacific, discovering and mapping new islands and territories.

³³ A number of scholarly works explore the notion of conceptual mapping. Particularly interesting is Richard Trim’s *Metaphor and the Historical Evolution of Conceptual Mapping* (2011). Polanyi refers to maps and mapping several times in writing about ‘articulation’, ‘theory’, and linguistic systems (1958:4, 21, 81, 83, 89, 94, 117).

I believe it will be useful to consider ‘translation’ as an additional construct for mapping Christian mission’s hermeneutical dimension. My map of this heuristic exploration includes several research questions:

(1) In the field of mission studies, how best can one conceptualise the process of gospel transmission across boundaries? Included in this question are the related questions of the importance of agency in gospel transmission and the understanding of culture(s).

(2) How does one locate cross-cultural mission activity in the lexicon of mission studies? How does one understand the history, meanings and implications of the various terms used to chart the hermeneutical dimension of mission?

(3) How can a conceptual notion of translation be understood and be expanded to become a worthy alternative to contextualisation and inculturation? How can one build this construct of mission as translation beginning with ideas gleaned from mission historians and critiqued by other scholars and myself?

(4) How can one deepen the ‘translation’ construct by using insights from philosophy and linguistics? How can the philosophical writings of Michael Polanyi serve this effort?

(5) How can one test the model with case studies drawn from biblical, historical and contemporary settings?

1.4 Methodology and Discovery

In order to map mission as translation, I offer definitions, make arguments and present validating case studies. Methodologically, this study represents an effort in hermeneutics, namely, the interpretation and application of texts. Hermeneutics, derived from the Greek term for interpretation, is textual analysis in which one seeks to understand the nuances of meaning in a text or social interaction and apply those

meanings to specific practices (Grondin 1994). Hans-Georg Gadamer built on Heidegger's perspective to define hermeneutics as 'the art of clarifying and mediating by our own effort of interpretation what is said by persons we encounter in tradition.' He defines hermeneutics as an effort including dialogue within the realm of linguistics and interpretation (Gadamer 1976:98). Thus, one not only clarifies the text but mediates what is said through conversations that involve question and answer.

The methods of philosophical hermeneutics – critical reading and analysis – that seek to ask questions of texts, provide an effective means with which to explore and identify the underlying assumptions that form the context of various writers' reflections.³⁴ One of the goals of philosophical hermeneutics is to become more acutely aware of the deepest assumptions with which we interpret the world. Interpretations of texts are always based upon an interpretive framework of some kind. Such a framework provides the interpreter with a set of lenses through which to understand and apply the meanings being presented by those who write.

Michael Polanyi's work as a scientist caused him to become acutely aware of frameworks and paradigms. He reflected on the relationship between perceptions and conceptualisations.

The power of our conceptions lies in identifying new instances of certain things we know. The function of our conceptual framework is akin to that of our perceptive framework, which enables us to see ever new objects as such, and to that of our appetites, which enables us to recognize ever new things as satisfying to them. It appears likewise akin to our power of practical skills, ever keyed up to meet new situations. We may comprise this whole set of faculties—our conceptions and skills, our perceptual framework and our drives—in one comprehensive power of anticipation. (Polanyi 1958:103)

Polanyi's creative work traced a route from perceptions to perspectives that I have already alluded to as a heuristic journey or the pursuit of discovery. His philosophical work is rooted in a creative and imaginative approach to scientific research. Polanyi's

³⁴ I am grateful to Philip N. Graham for his insights about Gadamer's 'philosophical hermeneutics' that appear in his unpublished PhD dissertation on Alasdair McIntyre. His dissertation is titled, 'Issues of Ethical Complexity for Adult Educators in Business-Oriented Organizational Learning Settings in the United States' (Virginia Commonwealth University, 2001).

experience as a chemist taught him that the scientific method actually was secondary to the role of the creative imagination in discovering new knowledge (Gelwick 1977:26).³⁵

Polanyi, the reflective scientist, highlighted the importance of making good guesses en route to recognizing a problem that could be solved. In an early publication, he writes:

The propositions of science thus appear to be in the nature of guesses ... There must be a sufficient foreknowledge of the whole solution to guide conjecture with reasonable probability in making the right choice at each consecutive stage. The process resembles the creation of a work of art which is firmly guided by a fundamental vision of the final whole, even though that whole can be definitely conceived only in terms of its yet undiscovered particulars.

I have previously suggested that the process of discovery is akin to the recognition of shapes as analysed by Gestalt psychology. (Polanyi 1946:31-33)

In his writings on epistemology, Polanyi frequently refers to the theme of discovery. He writes, 'To recognise a problem which can be solved and is worth solving is in fact a discovery in its own right ... Accident usually plays some part in discovery and its part may be predominant' (1958:120). Polanyi claims,

It follows that true discovery is not a strictly logical performance, and accordingly, we may describe the obstacle to be overcome in solving a problem as a 'logical gap', and speak of the width of the logical gap as the measure of the ingenuity required for solving the problem. 'Illumination' is then the leap by which the logical gap is crossed. It is the plunge by which we gain a foothold at another shore of reality. On such plunges the scientist has to stake bit by bit his entire professional life. (1958:122-3)

In one of his later writings, Polanyi emphasises yet again the role of the creative imagination and intuitive powers in the enterprise of scientific discovery.

And we may say this generally: Science is based on clues that have a bearing on reality: These clues are not fully specifiable. Nor is the process of integration which connects them fully definable. And the future manifestations of the reality indicated by this coherence are inexhaustible. These three indeterminacies defeat any attempt at a strict theory of scientific validity and offer space for the powers of the imagination and intuition. (1966b:88)

Polanyi's ideas about scientific discovery can be applied to drawing a map for 'translation' to guide Christian witnesses to transmit and receive gospel messages and

³⁵ Gelwick's 1965 PhD thesis, *Credere Aude*, was the first dissertation written on Michael Polanyi's thought. He published a book on Polanyi's philosophy titled, *The Way of Discovery* (1977).

practices into new settings; as Polanyi points out, knowing and articulating is ‘more art than science’. He argues that scientists act on hunches and faith, making commitments using intuition and imagination. Not only the scientist but the artist and the translator engage in quests involving presupposing reality, choosing problems, pursuing discovery, integrating unspecifiable clues, holding claims with universal intent, and expecting future manifestations of this reality (Polanyi 1966b:88, 92-3). Theologian Avery Dulles comments on Polanyi’s paradigm.

As a paradigm for discovery in all fields, including science, Polanyi proposed the Pauline scheme of faith, works and grace. Discovery begins in faith; for we must trust our own powers to perceive the problem, to envisage possible solutions, and to discriminate between the correct solution and its counterfeits. (Dulles 1984:539)

1.5 Sequence

In my Introduction, I locate this research as a discourse in mission studies. I reflect on key terms: mission, mission studies and missiology plus world Christianity and global Christianity. I identify research aims, research questions and my methodology. I introduce primary interlocutors and highlight in particular that I will investigate insights from Michael Polanyi, a twentieth-century philosopher.

In Chapter Two, I explore several terms currently used in the mission studies academy and show how contextualisation and inculturation have evolved as the leading conceptual terms; beginning in Chapter Two I go on to appraise the strengths and weaknesses of these two terms. I recognise two Roman Catholic theologians, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter, who are leading proponents of these terms being used to describe Christian mission. I find in the published work of Bevans and Schreiter some of the most thoughtful theological reflections about contextual themes available in the mission studies literature. Their works are cited frequently in missiological publications

and numerous scholars hail their achievements.³⁶ Their serious work and prominence in the mission studies academy have prompted me to identify them as ‘contextualisation interlocutors’ for my research testing the fruitfulness of translation as a missiological category. Bevens and Schreiter also are astute critics of translation models. Bevens critiques a certain view of translation that he identifies as one of a set of models of contextual theology. Schreiter also identifies and critiques what he calls a translation model of ‘local theology’.

In Chapter Three, I survey the variegated world of linguistic translation for insights to apply to my conceptual view of translation. These linguistic subjects include hermeneutics, philosophy of language, translation studies, and Bible translation. I go on to identify three ‘linguistic translation’ features: similarity and difference, transformation, and multiplicity. The first feature, ‘similarity and difference’, aligns with an emphasis associated with Kwame Bediako’s exploration of the interaction of universal faith convictions expressed in terms of African language, culture, and heritage. The second feature, ‘transformation’, connects with Andrew Walls’ linking of translation with conversion--and affirms that ‘turning toward Christ’ implies a transformed life and worldview. The third feature, ‘multiplicity’, reflects Lamin Sanneh’s charting of the influence of Bible translation on vernacular cultures. I use an associated term, ‘polyglossic’, to highlight that the gospel has come to be expressed in many cultures and languages.

Drawing on the work of translators and linguists, I particularly apply Eugene Nida’s communication theory to missional translation. I find Nida’s three-language model of source, translator and receptor to be a helpful framework for understanding the translation process. Using insights from Michael Polanyi, I take Nida’s translation

³⁶ See Bergmann 2003, Kraft 2005, Oboriji 2006, Kalu et al 2010, Pears 2010, and Skreslet 2012, all of whom cite both Bevens and Schreiter. Skreslet’s work on missiology, for example, includes in the index 12 references to Walls, six references to Sanneh and Schreiter and four to Bevens. The only other contemporary writers cited as often are Brian Stanley (6) and Dana Robert (5).

theory further and suggest that relevance theory, interpreted by Ernst-August Gutt, provides a way forward in translation studies.

In Chapter Four, I look closely at the writings of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako and interpret how each develops a missional notion of translation. Believing that their research represents a considerable degree of agreement, I then assess how their ideas are linked and how these scholars evince a measure of interdependence. I use insights from Bevens, Schreiter and others to critique the translation metaphor as articulated by Walls, Sanneh and Bediako.

In Chapter Five, I explore the usefulness of Michael Polanyi's ideas about epistemology or personal knowing. I argue that Polanyi's notions of discovery and indwelling offer methodological categories to describe how a mission translator pays attention to cultural particulars and integrates them into perceived meaningful patterns. I make note of Polanyi's category of 'conviviality' that describes how scientists share knowledge and test one another's claims (Polanyi 1958:209-12). This term underscores the need for communal interactions and mutual encouragement among those working together. I use Polanyi's notion of the tacit dimension as the primary hermeneutical tool in understanding mission as translation.

Marjorie Grene, Polanyi's tutor in the history of philosophy, comments,

Polanyi's unique contribution to philosophy is the theory of tacit knowing, the thesis that all knowledge necessarily includes a tacit component on which it relies in order to focus on its goal, whether of theoretical discovery and practical formulation or practical activity. (1977:164)

In applying Polanyi's tacit dimension to 'Mission as Translation,' I point out that the work of witness takes place in a plurality of cultural forms. Darrell Guder observes that 'translation always implies reduction' (Guder 2000:91-2) because one can never articulate a set of ideas or practices completely in another cultural setting and language. Something will get lost or 'reduced' in translation. The new translation, however, also

may contribute a richness of nuance and texture that is absent in the previous version. Something will be gained through new translations.

In Chapters Six, Seven and Eight, I present three case studies using translation as a conceptual notion to evaluate examples of cross-cultural mission. Chapter Six features a biblical case study drawn from the Apostle Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 8-10 about 'meat sacrificed to idols'. In Chapter Seven, I discuss an historical example of gospel transmission, the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Dream of the Rood*. Chapter Eight is a contemporary case study of an Arabic language film and companion book as examples of a missional presentation of the gospel to Arabic speakers. The film presents a dramatic rendering of the three related parables found in Luke 15. This film and commentary are the work of New Testament scholar, Kenneth Bailey, who has lived and worked in the Middle East. Chapter Nine concludes the thesis.

1.6 The Holy Spirit

My conceptualisation of mission as translation considers how human agents engage in the enterprise of transmitting and receiving the gospel across boundaries of context and culture. Transcendent actions and influences, however, play a crucial role in this transmission. The understanding of Christian mission as *missio Dei* presupposes the Holy Spirit as the primary agent of God's mission in and to the world. Although an in-depth biblical study on mission and translation is beyond the scope of this thesis, I refer to several New Testament passages that describe the work of the Holy Spirit in terms of communication and translation. Literary critic George Steiner 'wagers on transcendence' in matters of translation and proposes,

that any coherent understanding of what language is and how language performs, that any coherent account of the human capacity of human speech to communicate meaning and feeling is, in the final analysis, underwritten by the assumption of God's presence. (1989:3)

Although Steiner does not identify God by name or as triune, his recognition of the transcendent factor points to a presence I identify as God's Spirit or the Holy Spirit.

Important biblical passages about the Holy Spirit and missionary transmission are found in the Pauline and Johannine writings. Romans 8:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 2:9-13 express Paul's convictions that the (Holy) Spirit searches, comprehends, teaches, reveals, and intercedes in his ministry on behalf of members of the 'Body of Christ'. The Romans text indicates that the Spirit helps believers who cannot pray adequately. The Corinthian passage reveals the Spirit as a mediator who knows God's Spirit and enables humans to apprehend and understand what God bestows and has prepared 'for those who love him'.

In texts from the Fourth Gospel, the reader finds references to the 'Paraclete,' John's unique name for the Holy Spirit (John 13-17). These texts include John 14:16-17, 25-26; John 15:26-27; and John 16:12-15. 'Paraclete', means literally 'one called alongside' (*para* means 'alongside' and *kaleo* means 'called'). The term 'paraclete' is rendered as 'advocate', 'counsellor' and 'comforter' in English versions. The Paraclete, identified further as the Spirit of truth (14:17), remains with the believers, teaches the believers, reminds the believers of what Jesus has said, testifies to the believers, guides the believers into all truth and declares to them what belongs to Jesus and what will come.

I suggest that the New Testament understands the Holy Spirit to be the divine agent of translation. The Holy Spirit's many facets of ministry include the work of a translator and the agent of transformation. The Spirit communicates God's thoughts and Jesus' teaching to Christ's followers. In the Book of Acts, Luke tells of Jesus speaking to his disciples shortly before ascending to heaven. Jesus says, 'But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8). The Spirit's

communication ministry includes empowering disciples to bear witness. Bearing witness belongs to the work of mission.³⁷

Theologians and mission scholars have explored the theme of the Holy Spirit and Christian mission along several trajectories. Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on mission (*Redemptoris Missio*, 1990), declared that the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of mission' and that 'the Spirit is present and active in every place'.³⁸ David Bosch observes that 'the Spirit initiates, guides and empowers the Church's mission' (Bosch 1991:114). An intriguing discussion of the Holy Spirit's missionary role in the world has developed in the wake of the 1952 Willengen IMC Conference. Willengen promulgated a new understanding of God's mission in the world affirming that God's redemptive activity precedes the church's agency. How are *missio Dei* and ecclesiology connected? The role of the Holy Spirit is a key dimension of the relevant discussion. Kirsteen Kim cites James Dunn's observation that if mission is *missio Dei* and involves finding out where the Holy Spirit is moving in the world in order to join in, then 'discernment is the first act of mission' (Kim 2007:165).³⁹

1.7 Conclusion

My task is to explore how Christian mission is conducted and conceptualised as a theological practice in its hermeneutical dimension. This study takes a hard look at 'translation' to test it as a worthy concept to augment missiological discourse about

³⁷ David Bosch explores Luke's pneumatology and connects the Spirit and mission as Luke's distinctive contribution to the early church's missionary paradigm. He argues that the emphasis on the 'intrinsic missionary character' of the Spirit waned after the NT era, only to be rediscovered in the twentieth century (1991:113-115). Kirsteen Kim critiques Bosch's 'postmodern paradigm' for failing to account for essential issues in postmodernity and proposes a starting point for a mission theology that sees 'mission more as an attempt to live in the Holy Spirit than as a task to be accomplished' (Kim 2007:174-6). Damon So discusses the meanings of the Spirit and highlights the Spirit's work in communication (2006:267-78). John V. Taylor describes the Holy Spirit as 'the Go-Between God' (Taylor 1972:17-23).

³⁸ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (1990:paragraphs 21-30); available at www.vatican.va. Cf. also Oborji 2006:8-14.

³⁹ See also K. Kim 2010, Amos Yong 2000, Tennant 2010, and Ma & Ma 2010 for additional reflections on the Holy Spirit and mission.

indigenising the gospel. Because ‘translation’ is predominantly understood as a discipline involving texts, I realise that ‘translation as a concept’ must be explained carefully in a nuanced way. Translation as a discipline has been taken lightly before, even within the world of language and literature. Hillaire Belloc says as much in his 1931 Taylorian lecture:

The art of translation is a subsidiary art and derivative. On this account it has never been granted the dignity of original work, and has suffered too much in the general judgment of letters. This natural underestimation of its value has had the bad practical effect of lowering the standard demanded, and in some periods has almost destroyed the art altogether. The corresponding misunderstanding of its character has added to its degradation: neither its importance nor its difficulty has been grasped. (Bassnet 2002:13)

Translation is designated as ‘indirect’ discourse because the translator ‘analyzes, interprets, clarifies, solves ambiguities, decides on senses, and establishes the intonation, orientation, and intent’ so a text may read fluently in a receptor language. The translated text appears to read as the original or as direct discourse because of the work conducted in the background, the ‘translator’s invisibility’ (Petrilli 2003:21-2).⁴⁰

I use missional translation as a comprehensive construct to describe gospel transmission from person to person and from community to community. Each attempt to transmit the Christian gospel is unique and dependent upon many factors. The witnesses or translators may be ‘missioners’ or ‘sent ones’ and functionally be considered outsiders. Conversely, they may be indigenous witnesses and function as insiders. I posit you can be a missionary in either case. That is, one can be sent as a witness near or far. Theoretically, there is some psychological and cultural distance even between two persons in the same family. In cases of both indigenous and external agency, the human witness equation involves advocates of Christian faith who seek to offer a gospel that promises to transform the beliefs, values, and behaviour of a target society. No matter

⁴⁰ The illusion of invisibility or transparency is achieved when a translated text reads fluently because few linguistic or stylistic peculiarities betray the original author’s foreignness. The illusory effect conceals the translator’s assumptions and intervention in the foreign text (Venuti 1995:1-2).

the time or place, the challenge of such an effort to transmit the gospel usually is one of cultural confrontation, however great or small.

Acts 10 tells the story of the apostle Peter's encounter with the Gentile centurion named Cornelius and describes an example of a converted witness.⁴¹ Peter the translator was converted before Cornelius the receptor experienced his own change of mind. Perhaps Peter had never registered the implications of Jesus' teaching about clean and unclean in light of the Gentiles. The encounter with Cornelius and the Holy Spirit moved Peter closer to understanding Christ's teaching. Peter's example reminds us about the continuing conversion of the church as each new translation discloses dimensions of the gospel not previously seen (Guder 2000:87).

Distinguishing between what is essential to this Christian gospel in advancing Christian conversion has always been a challenge for missionaries. Robert Schreiter refers to this as the issue of criteria (Schreiter 1997:82). When Christian essentials are seen to include substantial elements of the missionary culture, the potential for paying attention to the receptor society diminishes. When Christian essentials are made minimal, and indigenous customs readily incorporated, according to Andre Droogers, the possibility of a locally asymmetrical version of religious syncretism increases.⁴² Christian missionaries will do well to pay attention to what Droogers and others see as the twin opposing dangers of cultural alienation and excessive religious syncretism. I now turn to consider terms and categories to guide a missionary in navigating the path.

⁴¹ In Joppa Peter had a vision about animals, reptiles, and birds he considered unclean. A voice in the vision directed Peter not to consider profane or unclean what God had made clean. As Peter subsequently met with Cornelius and his household in Caesarea, he understood the meaning of the vision as a means of correcting his previous notion of not associating with Gentiles. Peter went on to communicate the Christian gospel to his Gentile audience, and the hearers received the Holy Spirit and were baptized. Peter, the apostolic witness, gained a new perspective in his assessment of Gentiles as candidates for Christian faith.

⁴² Syncretism is a 'tricky term', according to Andre Droogers because 'it is used with both an objective and subjective meaning'. Droogers distinguishes the objective meaning to describe the mixing of religions and the subjective meaning to refer to the evaluation of the intermingling from the standpoint of one of the religions in view. In terms of Christian mission, Droogers describes syncretism as 'asymmetrical and local' when a non-Christian influence causes Christian essentials to be blurred or minimized (1989:7-25).

CHAPTER TWO

Coming to Terms: Inculturation, Contextualisation, or Translation?

2.1 Introduction

Concern over matters of culture vis-a-vis the Christian gospel date to the church's earliest days. The first century church experienced and resolved a crisis over the Gentile problem after the church in Jerusalem discovered another group of worshippers in Greek-speaking Antioch. According to Luke's account, the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) pondered the challenge of cultural outsiders becoming followers of Jesus and, hence, members of Christ's body. Considered retrospectively, the decision of the Jerusalem Council in favour of Gentile inclusion opened the door for the Pauline missions and many subsequent translations of the one gospel into multiple cultural settings.¹ According to Andrew Walls, subsequent centuries of Christian history² bear witness to an ongoing series of translations of the good news of Jesus Christ into a variety of cultural settings: Hellenistic, Roman, and European. Today those translations are reaching into the cultures of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (Walls 1996:30).

The Christian gospel may be likened to a singular story or tune with many variations. No one 'gospel expression' or single culture's apprehension of Christian faith may be considered normative. Yet the many expressions or translations of this Christian message and worldview share common elements. Even in the early days of the first-

¹ I am using the term 'gospel' as a generalized concept or synecdoche referring to the Christian faith or the Christian message.

² Walls, invoking lessons learned from K. S. Latourette's *A History of the Expansion of Christianity*, distinguishes 'Christian history' from church history as an effort 'to study the Christian faith in relation to human history as a whole' and not limited by 'ecclesiological choice' or Western theological curricula (Walls 2002:5-7).

century church, the gospel was articulated in diverse expressions yet echoed the same themes. One gospel summary is Romans 1:1-6.³

Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, ²which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy scriptures, ³the resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord, ⁵through whom we have received gospel concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh ⁴and was declared to be Son of God with power according to the spirit of holiness by grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for the sake of his name, ⁶including yourselves who are called to belong to Jesus Christ.

I posit a universal accessibility to hearing and embracing the gospel.⁴ Such accessibility is dependent upon the Christian community's ability to relate the gospel to any culture or in any context. The global profusion of twenty-first century Christian communities attests to this universality.

The January 2006 issue of the *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, titled 'Just What Is the Gospel?' included gospel descriptions by a Roman Catholic pope, an Anabaptist pacifist, and Baptist missionaries. Editor Jonathan Bonk, invoking the summary statement of the Nicene Creed, points out that the 'irreducible essence of the Gospel—whatever the time, place, culture, or church communion—is that Jesus the Christ, God's only begotten Son, is the key to unlocking our human potential, both now and in the world to come' (Bonk 2006:1-2).

The gospel includes not only core beliefs but also the values that define community behaviour for those who identify themselves with such affirmations. Closely linked to moral values is the set of practices that describes Christian discipleship. The gospel also features a narrative of God and God's people that runs through the Christian scriptures. Finally, the gospel builds in disciples a worldview which functions as a place to stand in

³ The four canonical gospels all relate the Jesus story as 'gospel' or good news. Of the 24 speeches in The Book of Acts, 19 are identified as uttered by Christian speakers: Peter (eight), Paul (nine) plus Stephen (Acts 7:2-53) and James (Acts 15:13-21). Most of these contain gospel presentations. See Soards (1994:182-192) for comments on the substance of the speeches.

⁴ In Romans 1:19-21 the apostle Paul declares that all humankind has a knowledge of God's power visible through the expression of God's created order. Acts 1:8 articulates a promise delivered from Jesus to his Eleven disciples (named in v 13) regarding the Holy Spirit's power available for their work of witness 'to the ends of the earth.' Acts 2 describes the Day of Pentecost when the disciples spoke or were heard enabled by the Holy Spirit in many languages the good news of 'God's deeds of power' (Acts 2:1-13).

the world.⁵ To speak of the ‘one gospel’ expressed in many forms throughout multiple cultures and ages is to affirm the presence of threads of continuity or constants that are recognizable in every authentic gospel articulation. Andrew Walls refers to an ‘essential continuity’ that includes the constant of Christology and the constant of ecclesiology. Roman Catholic theologians Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder propose four additional constants: eschatology, salvation, anthropology, and culture (2004:33).⁶

How shall we describe the process whereby Christian faith becomes the possession and life-ordering worldview of a community, a people, or a nation? How can we describe what happens when a previously alien worldview, a new faith and new lifestyle, are adopted by a community and then shapes that community’s thoughts and practices? I have surveyed the literature of mission studies and discovered that two terms, ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’, predominate in the missiological lexicon. I shall offer a reading of ‘translation’ as a third term and explore its capacity to compare favourably to both inculturation and contextualisation. I test the hypothesis that translation can be construed in a way that utilises the best features of inculturation and contextualisation but incorporates other features to build a more robust conceptualisation.

The defined terms of the discussion are more than semantic. Terms represent traditions within the broader church, including missiological emphases and ideological preferences; therefore, terminology may express both explicit and tacit messages. Such terminology is significant in seeking to express as clearly and directly as possible the relationship between the constants of the biblical gospel that offer the good news of Jesus Christ and the contexts of place, time, and culture. These terms articulate

⁵ A worldview is an ‘interpretation of human existence’ that seeks to address ‘ultimate questions,’ in light of one’s ‘history, experience, tradition and relationship to the natural world’ (Kirk 1999:86). Worldviews have been called ‘mental maps of the universe’ that help humans navigate a way through that universe. The maps cover not only ‘the phenomenal world but whatever we recognise as transcending that world’—including ideas about morality, obligation and religion (Walls 2012:155).

⁶ Bevans and Schroeder (2004:171-74) identify Christian constants yet raise questions about discerning an ‘essence of Christianity’ wherein the missionary simply inserts the gospel essence into a culture like one planting seeds in a new field or changing the gospel’s clothing to fit a particular context.

pragmatic concerns about the processes, emphases, attitudes, and tools employed by missionaries in interpreting the gospel in various settings.

Efforts to represent the Christian gospel in various cultural settings raise challenging hermeneutical questions in the field of mission studies. How can the gospel be interpreted in ways that faithfully transmit the essence of the Christian gospel and also make sense to new practitioners in indigenous languages and cultures? I turn first to consider briefly the notion of culture.

2.2 The Concept of Culture

James McClendon asserts that ‘culture’ in its present-day sense is a modern construct. The biblical writers, he reminds us, tell of a mission to all *ethnoi*⁷ (Matthew 28:19a); they affirm that God loved the *world* (John 3:16); and use the metaphor of a field to be sown and harvested (Matthew 13:3-34). The word ‘culture’ in English derives etymologically from the tilling of a field in the enterprise of agriculture (McClendon 2000:22-3). Since the early part of the twentieth century, anthropologists, sociologists, and missionaries have grappled with various notions of culture.⁸ Historic definitions of culture include Sir Edward Tylor’s 1871 effort: ‘that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society’ (Shorter 1988:4, Luzbetak 1988:134). Robert Lowrie’s 1937 definition of culture is similar to Tylor’s: ‘the sum total of what an individual acquires from his society—those beliefs, customs, artistic norms, food-habits,

⁷ The NRSV translates *ethnoi* or *ethne* as ‘nations’ but that the English word, ‘nation(s)’, has overtones of the modern nation-state. A better rendering is ‘ethnic people groups.’

⁸ See T.J. Gorringer’s concise introduction to the ‘meanings of culture’ in *Furthering Humanity: A Theology of Culture* (2004: 3-32) and also the work of Charles H. Kraft, *Anthropology for Christian Witness* (1996:ch. 3). Literary critic Terry Eagleton discusses various views of culture and contemporary debates about it in *The Idea of Culture* (2000).

and crafts which came to him not by his own creative activity but as a legacy from the past, conveyed by formal or informal education' (Luzbetak 1988:134).

The modern view of culture is an anthropological concept that interacts with linguistics and other social sciences.⁹ Perhaps the true pioneer of this anthropological notion was the German-American scholar Franz Boas (Tanner 1997:25). Boas published *General Anthropology* in 1935 and *Race, Language and Culture* in 1940. Kathryn Tanner argues that a turning point in the field of anthropology occurred when German-trained scholars arrived in the United States. The German high view of *Kultur* gave way to the Anglo-American 'culture', meaning 'the customs of particular peoples viewed as distinct self-contained wholes' (Tanner 1997:18-19). Robert Schreier identifies Johann Gottfried Herder (*Outline of a Philosophy of the History of Man*, 1774) as an early forerunner championing an integrated notion of culture. 'The model of such an integrated concept of culture is the traditional society, relatively self-enclosed and self-sufficient, and governed by a rule-bound tradition' (1997:48).¹⁰

Twentieth-century theologians also have contributed to studies of culture, including the following: Paul Tillich, *Theology of Culture* (1959); H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (1951); T.S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (1968); Christopher Dawson, *Religion and the Rise of Western Culture* (1950); and Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (1973). Niebuhr drew upon American social anthropology and presented ideas against a backdrop of a post-war western society. His typology proved popular, but now seems inadequate because the categories overlap in places.¹¹ Because Niebuhr

⁹ James McClendon observes that 'those social scientists who laboured in exotic mountain kingdoms and remote ocean islands usually called themselves 'cultural anthropologists' [and] those who labelled themselves 'sociologists' usually sought to apply similar methods to Western society' (2000:28).

¹⁰ Other pioneers include Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1922); Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture* (1934); A.L. Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn, *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (1952); Claude Levi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology* (1963); and Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780-1950* (1961).

¹¹ Niebuhr's models are: 'Christ against culture', 'Christ of culture', 'Christ above culture', 'Christ and culture in paradox', 'Christ transforming culture.' See Gorringer (2004:12-16). See the assessment of Niebuhr's typology in Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation: A New Vision of Christ and Culture* (1996). Other more recent reappraisals of Niebuhr

emphasised that living in human culture requires negotiating God's good creation spoiled by sin, his attempt sees Christ and culture as fundamentally incompatible (Carter 2006:35). Niebuhr's five models seek to articulate what Christians have done to negotiate this impasse throughout history.

Bernard Lonergan's typology offers two overarching ways of classifying culture. The first is a classicist view in which culture is construed as normative, universal, and permanent. The second is an empiricist view in which a set of meanings and values informs a way of life. This understanding allows that no culture is deemed better than another. Lonergan's distinction explains how western societies under the deep influence of the Enlightenment might evince the classicist notion of culture by conceiving of their Christian mission activities necessarily exporting commerce and civilisation as well as Christianity (Lonergan 1973:xi).

American anthropologist Clifford Geertz's 'symbolic anthropology' gives attention to the role of thought expressed in symbols in society. Geertz represents a pioneering effort in the semiotic view of culture. His interest in appreciating the richness and complexity of sign systems led him to seek a 'thick description' of culture, a term he borrowed from philosopher Gilbert Ryle (Geertz 1973:6, 27). The thick description shows the wealth and the randomness of culture. He described his concept as follows:

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz 1973:5)

Theologian Schreiter favours this semiotic approach to culture and invokes Geertz's views and definitions in his 1985 work, *Constructing Local Theologies*.¹² In his 1997 book, *The New Catholicity: Theology between the Global and the Local*, Schreiter

include Craig A. Carter's *Rethinking Christ and Culture: A Post-Christian Perspective* (2006) and D.A. Carson's *Christ and Culture Revisited* (2008).

¹² See Schreiter's discussion of Geertz in *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985:49-56).

adjusts his preference to the semiotic schema of Jens Loenhoeff, who posits that culture performs three functions.¹³

Culture is ideational: it provides systems and frameworks of meaning which serve to interpret the world and provide guidance for living in the world. Thus, culture embodies beliefs, values, attitudes and rules for behaviour.

Culture is performance: rituals that bind a culture's members together to provide them with a participatory way of embodying and enacting their histories and values.

Culture is material: the artefacts and symbolizations that become a source for identity: language, food, clothing, music, and the organization of space. (Schreiter (1997:29)

The signs of a culture carry messages along the paths or codes of culture; the circulating messages create identity and solidarity among the members of a culture. The hermeneutical challenge of communicating between cultures asks how a message is to be communicated via different codes, using a mixture of signs from two or more cultures.¹⁴ An understanding of translation history and methods may inform and adjust such a semiotic model to be more useful. Schreiter believes that concepts of culture fall into two overarching types: integrated and globalised. The effect of globalisation suggests more interactions and wider contact among cultures in the twenty-first century.

Bevans and Schroeder join Schreiter in preferring a semiotic understanding of culture. I appreciate their reading of culture as a system of signs and their alertness to globalising influences. Bevans argues against a positivist view of culture by going beyond Geertz's web analogy when he claims that culture is 'the web not reduced to the elements of the web; it is the whole in a dynamic relationship'.¹⁵

Because cultures are both dynamic and complex, however, one needs flexible and adjustable interpretation grids to assess cultural change. This leads me to raise four

¹³ Jens Loenhoeff, *Interkulturelle Verständigung. Zum Problem grenzüberschreitender Kommunikation.* (1992:144). Bevans and Schroeder also follow this description of culture in their work *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (2004).

¹⁴ The latter decades of the twentieth century witnessed an explosion of studies by theologians and missionaries pursuing a better understanding of culture for gospel ministry. Among these were *Down to Earth: Studies in Christianity and Culture* edited by John R.W. Stott and Robert Coote (1980), representing evangelical voices; another seminal work was Louis Luzbetak's *The Church and Cultures* (1970/1988), which became a textbook for Roman Catholic missionary training.

¹⁵ Private conversation with Stephen Bevans on 3 November 2009.

concerns. First, Tanner offers a postmodern criticism of the modern view of culture and its totalising tendencies. She levels the ‘charge of inattention to historical process’ and decries the tendency ‘to see cultures as internally consistent wholes’ thereby distorting the realities of lived practices (Tanner 1997:40-43). She also doubts that cultures represent consensus or reflect a principle of social order. Finally she argues against seeing cultures as reflective of the primacy of cultural stability or as representing ‘sharply bounded, self-contained units’ (Tanner 1997:51-4). She argues that cultures defy easy anthropological analysis because they are complex entities.¹⁶ I concur that a contemporary understanding of culture must navigate the complexities of globalising influences and culture clashes.

My second concern is whether any interpretation of a given culture can truly be neutral or non-judgemental. Anthropologists struggle for objectivity just as the missionaries did before them. The observer as anthropologist or missionary has a standpoint within an academic discipline or vocational set of practices. Objectivity is elusive, if not impossible. Who will critique the observer? (McClendon 2000:27-8). Michael Polanyi’s insistence that there is no knowledge without a situated knowing subject underscores this concern. He notes that the reflecting person must navigate between the ‘demand for impersonality’ (objectivity) and a ‘skepticism that lacks conviction.’¹⁷

A third concern regarding the study of culture is that the Loenhoeff typology and other semiotic models do not adequately address the narrative quality of culture. The ideational function expresses interpretation frameworks, beliefs, and customs but a culture’s history or sense of a shared story may deserve a separate category. Paul G.

¹⁶ Cultures also function like ‘silent languages’ according to Gerald Arbuckle. ‘Traditions, values, attitudes and prejudices are silent... in the sense that people are most often unconscious of their presence and influence’ (Arbuckle 1990:1). Polanyi’s notion of the ‘tacit dimension of personal knowing’ may inform the missionary, anthropologist or missiologist in efforts to discover what is hidden in a cultural context.

¹⁷ Polanyi devotes a chapter of PK to ‘commitment’ and discusses the interactions among the ‘Subjective’, the ‘Personal’ and the ‘Universal.’ Cf Polanyi 1958:300-06.

Hiebert makes reference to synchronic and diachronic dimensions of critical contextualisation. Synchronic studies examine the basic structures of reality existing at a single point in time, while diachronic studies examine the underlying story of the data being analysed (Hiebert 2009:33-5). This latter category highlights ‘narrative’.

Finally, modern or anthropological views of culture may be challenged to consider theological values that the Christian missionary claims is important. In light of Geertz’s assertions, have we spun our own webs or are we suspended in webs spun by a creator? My theological premise is that a society’s culture reflects God’s natural gifts to humankind as well as human constructs.¹⁸ T.J. Gorringer identifies several theological themes in his reading of Karl Barth on culture. Barth follows Augustine in invoking the need for grace for humankind to do any good work. Gorringer identifies Barth’s reading of culture as ‘the furthering of humanity’. Gorringer’s task is a theological appraisal of gospel and culture relations by registering the significance of the Incarnation, invoking a scepticism about the possibility of any culture realising the kingdom, and marking eschatology as a key category for culture in the process of ‘human becoming’ (Gorringer 2004:17-22).

Lesslie Newbigin returned to Britain following decades of missionary service in India to note his own western culture changing rapidly and disengaging from Christian faith. This experience plus his theological assumptions led him to reflect on the relationship of the Christian gospel within a pluralist society composed of various cultures. In his work *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society*, he wrote:

It is only by being faithful participants in a supranational, multicultural family of churches that we can find the resources to be at the same time faithful sustainers and cherishers of our respective cultures and also faithful critics of them. The gospel endorses an immensely wide diversity among human cultures, but it does not endorse a total relativism. There is good and bad in every culture and there are developments continually going on in every culture which may be either creative or destructive, either in line with the purpose of God as revealed in Christ for all human beings, or else out of that line. The criteria for making judgments between the one and the other cannot arise from one culture. That is the familiar error of cultural imperialism. There can only be criteria if God has in fact shown us what his will is. He has done so in Christ (Newbigin 1989:197).

¹⁸ See Genesis 1:28, 31.

Newbigin articulates the issue of how a Christian believer can be both local and catholic in working out this double allegiance.

Once again this faith cannot be shown to be valid by reference to some more ultimate belief. Like every other human belief, it is part of the tradition of belief developed and handed down in one particular human community. But this community is one which is more and more fully represented in all the vast variety of human cultures. Those who belong to it are people formed both by the human cultures in which they have been nourished and also by the traditions which they share with all Christian believers. They belong to two cultures. In Pauline language, while living as the people of Philippi or Corinth or Rome, they have a citizenship in heaven (Philippians 3:20). What then is the relationship between these two citizenships, these two affiliations? (Newbigin 1989:192-3, 197)

I cite a definition supplied by Louis Luzbetak. Luzbetak, a Roman Catholic missionary theologian, was trained in anthropology. His dual background in theology and anthropology prepared him to view cultures and subcultures as manifesting ‘patterns’. This approach guides his work in cultural analysis (Luzbetak 1988:157). Particularly, I find the notion of cultures as patterned systems of ‘norms, standards, notions and beliefs’ resonant with epistemological insights gleaned from studying Michael Polanyi’s works (Polanyi 1966:6). Luzbetak articulates a missiological perspective of culture, referring to culture as a socially shared design for living.

Culture is (1) a *plan* (2) consisting of a set *norms, standards*, and associated *notions and beliefs* (3) for *coping* with the various demands of life, (4) shared by a *social group*, (5) *learned* by the individual from the society, and (6) organized into a *dynamic* (7) *system* of control... Culture is indeed very much a kind of map or blueprint for living. It is a plan according to which a society is to adapt itself to its *physical, social*, and *ideational* environment... When speaking of culture, we are therefore speaking not of things or events as such but of *ideas*. Culture is the ideational code *underlying* behaviour... Culture is a society’s set of rules for the game of life, not the played out game itself... Culture in the last analysis is therefore a set of *symbols* and *meanings*. (Luzbetak 1988:156-7; emphasis original)

Luzbetak also observes that ‘cultures are often subdivided into subcultures; and both cultures and subcultures consist of patterns that occur either as universals or as specialities or alternatives’ (Luzbetak 1988:197-8).

I also take seriously Tanner’s critique of modern cultural criticism. She points out that the integration of a culture’s many elements requires some internal organization.

Understanding how these elements are interrelated leads an observer to seek a principle of social order. She claims that social coherence implies cultural coherence. The principle of coherence can be an expressive one with one dominant motif or value presiding over all of life. A culture also might be integrated on a semantic level. On a logico-semantic level the cultural elements relate to one another in the way a text or a narrative does. If a culture is construed as a system of signs, translation between cultures may occur like translation between languages. Bringing external categories and analytic tools to investigate a culture begs the huge assumption that all cultures are similar to each other and yield to such analysis. Tanner's concerns about complexity and consensus prompt the anthropologist and missionary to proceed cautiously. Her postmodern critique invites all anthropologists, or observers of culture, to practice the strategy of self-criticism (Tanner 1997:30-51, 56-8).

McClendon invokes Jesus' parable of the Sower and Seed (Mark 4) to find advice for missionaries who would seek to represent the gospel within and among various cultures. They should 'attend to the cultural soils that lie beneath their witnessing feet' (McClendon 2000:60). Culture itself is not an agent but is a field that awaits the fruitful work of the gardener. Gardeners must work to learn how a culture operates on explicit and tacit levels. Because the ministry of Christ promises transformation of human beings and human societies, missionary-gardeners carefully may consider how to introduce transforming elements and measures to the agricultural task.¹⁹ Missioners often are outsiders who enter a cultural setting as a guest embodying good news who then must balance a respect for one's host setting and a zeal for God's good news.

Anthropologists, sociologists and missiologists serve mission studies well by analysing the concept of culture, by identifying cultural forms and by exploring paradigms for understanding societies and societal change. Culture ought to be

¹⁹ See the work by Samuel and Sugden (1999) on 'mission as transformation'.

considered neither as an independent force nor a static reality. Cultures are arenas where persons and communities act as agents in creating patterns by devising customs and norms and practices. It is individuals and communities who act both knowingly and unintentionally to create, destroy, change, improve and interact with their cultural settings. Paying attention to these patterns of living yields insights to those who seek to understand how and why people think and act as they do.

2.3 Inculturation

Peter Schineller, a Jesuit serving in Nigeria and Ghana, claims that wherever the gospel is lived or shared there is an ongoing engagement of the faith in a particular context or culture. Rather than being a separate goal, Schineller suggests that ‘inculturation’ should result from ‘ongoing immersion in the lives, struggles and culture of a particular community’ (Schineller 1990:12, 126, n. 6). Aylward Shorter identifies ‘inculturation’ as one of several terms: enculturation,²⁰ acculturation, cultural domination, inculturation, and interculturation (Shorter 1988:3-13).²¹ David Bosch includes in his ‘emerging postmodern missionary paradigm’ three related topics: contextualisation, liberation, and inculturation (1991:420-457). Aylward Shorter indicates that ‘inculturation’ is used for the first time in 1962 and then officially by the Pope in

²⁰ A. R. Crollius distinguishes ‘inculturation’ as ‘the Church inserted in a culture’ from a term used in cultural anthropology, ‘enculturation’, that refers to the process by which an individual becomes part of a culture.’ The anthropological ‘enculturation’ and the missiological ‘inculturation’ give rise to the idea of an individual enculturated in one’s own cultural context and a church inculturated or inserted into a culture (Crollius 1984:4-5, 7). Shorter agrees that ‘enculturation’ is a sociological concept used analogously by theologians and transposed into ‘inculturation.’ Enculturation refers to the cultural learning process of an individual whereby one is inserted or assimilated into one’s culture or society (Shorter 1988:5-6). Luzbetak likens enculturation to socialization and regards it as ‘a lifelong process of mastering an adaptive system’ (Luzbetak 1988:182). Ben Knighton cites anthropologist M. J. Herkovits and claims, ‘to enculture somebody is to envelope that body in a culture’ (Knighton 2007:61-3).

²¹ Schineller lists *imposition*, *translation* and *adaptation* as inadequate words describing this gospel and culture engagement. He identifies *indigenization*, *contextualization*, *incarnation*, and *acculturation* as more adequate terms alongside his preferred choice: *inculturation* (1990:14-23).

1979.²² He describes inculturation as ‘the on-going dialogue between faith and culture or cultures.’ It is the ‘creative and dynamic relationship between the Christian message and a culture’ (Shorter 1988:11). Timothy Gorringer acknowledges that the idea is implicit in the practices of seventeenth century Jesuits like Matteo Ricci and Roberto de Nobili, who learned Mandarin and Tamil, respectively, in an effort to commend the gospel to Chinese and Indian peoples. Inculturation effectively replaced the older term ‘indigenisation’ (Gorringer 2004:199-200). Schineller indicates that indigenisation highlights the responsibility of the local community to form the local church. He notes, however, that the term indigenisation may represent too static a view of culture (Schineller 1990:18).

Schineller and Shorter both cite Pedro Arrupe, a former superior general of the Jesuits, who offers this definition in a 1978 letter to the Society of Jesus.

Inculturation is the incarnation of Christian life and of the Christian message in a particular cultural context, in such a way that this experience not only finds expression through elements proper to the culture in question, but becomes a principle that animates, directs and unifies the culture, transforming and remaking it so as to bring about ‘a new creation’. (Schineller 1996:109; Shorter 1988:11)

Bosch also cites Arrupe and contends that Protestant acceptance of the term followed the lead of Jesuits and other Catholics. Bosch describes inculturation as necessary because the Christian faith ‘never exists except as translated’ into a culture (1991:447).²³ When the missionary enterprise adjusted strategy away from the assumption that western Christians were exporting a supra-cultural and universal gospel, the old gospel and culture terms, ‘adaptation’ or ‘accommodation’ (Catholic) and ‘indigenisation’ (Protestant), began to give way to ‘inculturation’. Bosch represents ‘inculturation’ as an advance over older models in several ways. The agents of mission

²² Shorter says that the ‘first recorded use’ of the term ‘inculturation’ in a theological sense seems to be by Joseph Masson, SJ, who wrote in 1962 of the urgent need for a ‘Catholicism that is inculturated in a variety of forms’ (Shorter 1988:10). John Paul II served as the Roman Catholic pontiff from 1978 until 2005.

²³ Bosch’s use of ‘translated’ is, in this example, his way of saying that the gospel never appears independent of a cultural setting. He cites Sanneh’s work (1989/2009) that charts the early church transitioning from Jewish cultural forms to Gentile expressions.

are not solely the missionaries but they work as agents of the Holy Spirit and alongside the laity of the local community. ‘Inculturation’ features a decided emphasis on the local situation. Under the heading of ‘contextualization’, Bosch says similarly that ‘mission as contextualization involves the construction of a variety of local theologies’. Bosch envisions a double movement in inculturation in which ‘there is at once inculturation of Christianity and Christianization of culture’ (Bosch 1991:453-4). Girma Bekele reports that Bosch, criticised for not including Two-Thirds-World voices in his book, *Transforming Mission*, nonetheless, realized that inculturation represented the necessary shift from indigenised theology to contextualised theology and would require listening to the voices of the Two-Thirds World (Bekele 2011:71).

In his work, *Toward A Theology of Inculturation* (1988), Shorter describes three aspects of inculturation:

1. Inculturation, as an idea, applies to more than just the initial insertion of faith into a non-Christian culture; response and development are included in ‘inculturation’ as well. ‘As long as faith is present to a culture, the dialogue must take place. It is a process that never comes to an end.’
2. Christian faith cannot exist except in a cultural form.
3. Inculturation transcends mere acculturation. It implies a development characterized by reformulation or reinterpretation. (1988:11-12)

Shorter’s description emphasises that the inculturation process is dynamic and two-sided. It goes beyond the missionary’s introduction of the gospel to a community and includes development and reconfiguration. This emphasis on local engagement and reformulation becomes accented even more heavily in the term contextualisation.

Gorringe and J. Andrew Kirk understand ‘inculturation’ as both a term and concept particularly favoured in Roman Catholic circles. Schineller, Shorter and Arrupe are all Roman Catholic thinkers. Masson’s initial use of the term came right before the opening of Vatican II. Arrupe’s definition makes sense in the wake of Vatican II’s pronouncements that opened the door to vernacular expressions of the gospel. By the late 1970’s, the Latin Mass was giving way to a widespread adoption of vernacular

liturgies. Francis Oboriji discusses ‘adaptation’ as an element of Catholic missiology and then makes the case for ‘inculturation’ as a post-Vatican II understanding of gospel and culture matters that belongs to both Conciliar and Catholic theology (2006:99-117). He states that in Protestant circles, the terms ‘communication’ and ‘translation’ are used to discuss issues of adaptation that belong to the current debates about inculturation and contextualization. The Catholic emphasis on sacramental theology and the preference for an embodied missionary presence rather than verbal proclamation highlights how the gospel is to be expressed in new cultures. Kirk points out the potential problem of ‘a polycentric Church’ expressing the gospel in many cultures over and against a Catholic vision of central authority vested in Rome. Protestants and Pentecostals have a stronger sense of ecclesial autonomy and may have fewer qualms about the indigenising effects of inculturation (Kirk 1999:90-91; Gorringer 2004:199ff.).

The missiological academy includes many other voices giving descriptions and analyses of inculturation.²⁴ The Asian-American and Roman Catholic theologian Peter Phan believes [inculturation] will be ‘the most urgent and controversial issue in mission for decades to come’ and that ‘current ideas and practices’ are undergoing revision’ (Phan 2003:xii). His convictions bear witness to ongoing discussions in the mission studies academy about how to understand the variety of incarnations of Christian faith in global settings. Controversy may ensue when expressions of Christian faith test the boundaries of orthodoxy. That the gospel must be contextualised or inculturated, however, has become accepted in most quarters as a matter of orthodoxy itself.

Michael Amaladoss has written a book of reflections on inculturation from his perspective as a Roman Catholic in India. He reminds his readers that when the gospel encounters cultures in Asia, it also must be prepared to meet other religions, great and

²⁴ These include Justin Upkong (1994, 2002), Jean Marc Ela (1989), and B. Bujo (1992) from African perspectives; Asian thinkers include Aloysius Pieris (1993), Kim Yong Bock (1983), and Kosuke Koyama (1974). See G. Collet regarding inculturation, *metanoia*, and culture change (Greinacher and Mette 1994).

small. He argues that dialogue becomes an imperative and invokes the Indian tradition of *advaita* as an attempt to hold together pluralism and unity (Amaladoss 1998:107-109). His observation about the gospel meeting other religions is striking in terms of religious demographics.²⁵ I appreciate his argument about the need for dialogue and Lesslie Newbigin's claim that religious dialogue is most valuable when it discusses 'the meaning and goal of the human story' (Newbigin 1989:181).

2.4 Contextualisation

The term 'contextualisation' had its historic first appearance in 1972 in the ecumenical publication of the Theological Education Fund (TEF), *Ministry in Context*. The author, Shoki Coe, was a Taiwanese theologian who assumed leadership of the TEF in 1965.²⁶ Coe introduces both contextualisation and contextuality as 'the way toward reform in theological education' and contends that the new terms go beyond indigenisation—a term 'that is past-oriented because it tends to be used of the gospel interacting with traditional cultures' (Coe 1980:48-52). Contextualisation was described in this publication as 'the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one's own situation.'²⁷ Coe described the method of contextualisation as 'a continual interplay between Scripture (text) and one's ever-changing context' (Wheeler 2002:78). Orlando Costas identifies 'the context' as 'reality in all its dynamics constantly changing and affecting change.' He asserts that 'the question for Christian mission is whether or not we can consciously and critically incorporate it into, or give it context

²⁵ See *World Christian Database* for up to date statistics (www.worldchristiandatabase.org).

²⁶ Coe was born Chang Hui Hwang in Taiwan in 1914 and died in England in 1988.

²⁷ See 'Contextualization' by Dean Gilliland in the *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* edited by Scott Moreau (2000). Models of contextualisation are listed as: adaptation, anthropological, critical, semiotic, synthetic, transcendental, and translation. The diversity in these versions of contextualisation raises the question of how much can be connoted by this missiological term.

within, our efforts to interpret and communicate the gospel. This is what we do in contextualisation' (Costas 1982:4-5).

Darrell L. Whiteman offers a concise but instructive summary of contextualisation in an article titled, 'Contextualization: The Theory, the Gap, the Challenge.' Whiteman explains that contextualisation is part of an evolving stream of thought that relates the gospel and the church to a local context. Contextualisation and its companion term 'inculturation' are more dynamic and robust terms than the older ones, adaptation, accommodation, and indigenisation (Whiteman 1997:2). Whiteman posits three functions of contextualisation:

1. Communicating the gospel in word and deed and establishing churches in ways that make sense to people within their local cultural context and allow people to follow Christ and remain within their own culture.

2. Presenting the gospel in prophetic ways that challenge the context and offend but offend only for the right reasons.

3. Developing contextualised expressions of the gospel that contribute new dimensions to how the universal church understands the kingdom and mutual learning between cultures and churches (Whiteman 1997:2-6).²⁸

Hwa Yung, an Asian theologian, discusses both inculturation and contextualisation in assessing criteria for a missiological theology. He locates contextualisation as rooted in incarnation. Like other writers he cites Andrew Walls' articulation of both an 'indigenizing principle' and a 'pilgrim principle'.²⁹ These principles refer to a sense of the particular (indigenous churches expressing faith in Christ in local cultures) and to a sense of the universal (churches and individual believers realizing that each culture will be transcended by what lies at the end of the eschatological journey). Walls, however,

²⁸ In his 1997 article Whiteman concluded that there existed considerable resistance to contextualisation from denominational leaders, mission executives, and leaders of the younger churches.

²⁹ See Bosch's citation of Walls' principles (1991:455).

describes such principles under the rubric of ‘translation’ rather than ‘contextualisation.’³⁰

Yung also argues for the importance of clarifying the underlying epistemological foundation for contextualisation and cites Hiebert’s assertion that a ‘positivist’ epistemology resulted in a distinct lack of contextualisation in the colonial period of mission activity (Yung 1997:44-60, 63-4).³¹ Hiebert, an anthropologist writing about mission, pioneered the term ‘critical contextualization’ as he searched for a method that helped move mission beyond colonialism and ethnocentrism without moving too far in the direction of uncritical contextualisation and syncretism (1985:104-12; 2009:26-9).³²

2.4.1 Stephen Bevans and Contextual Theology

Stephen Bevans along with Robert Schreiter explore ‘contextualisation’ under the rubrics of contextual theologies and local theologies (Bevans 1992:26-33; Schreiter 1985:6-12). Bevans and Roger Schroeder in their recent and ambitious project to offer a ‘theology of mission for today’ identify the pertinent term as ‘inculturation’ but use the term interchangeably with ‘contextualisation’ (2004:385-9). In a more recent publication Bevans asserts that ‘contextualization is a theological imperative’ in which ‘theologizing takes its context seriously’ even if a ‘theologian’s consciousness of context is more implicit than explicit’ (Bevans 2009:52).

In the 2002 edition of his book that describes models of contextual theology, Stephen Bevans draws particularly upon cultural anthropology in his advocacy of building local or indigenous theologies. Bevans presupposes an understanding of theology that is ‘unabashedly subjective’. He contends that ‘contextual theology’ values culture, history,

³⁰ See also the original context of the pilgrim and indigenisation principles in Walls (1996:7-9).

³¹ See Paul Hiebert’s *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts* (1999). Another work that explores epistemology and missiology is *To Stake a Claim* (1999) edited by J. Andrew Kirk and Kevin Vanhoozer.

³² Hiebert offers four steps in his model of ‘critical contextualization’: 1) exegesis of the culture 2) exegesis of the scriptures 3) community-wide critical evaluation of cultural practice in light of scripture, and 4) arrangement by the community of all new practices into a contextualised ritual.

contemporary thought forms, and other dimensions of a context so as to consider them along with scripture and tradition as valid sources for theological expression. Bevans asserts that scripture and tradition represent the experience of the past in theological reflection. Bevans claims that one's experience of the present (cultural forms and particular circumstances) also is an essential source for theology. Bevans goes on to privilege 'present experience', such as context or local culture, as the primary source of theology as indicated in his phrase, 'contextual theology' (Bevans 2002:3-15; 2003:52-3; Bevans and Schroeder 2004:386-9; 2011:70).³³

Bevans identifies six models of contextual theology that reflect a spectrum of approaches to contextualising the gospel.³⁴ He outlines his reasons for preferring the term contextualisation.

All three aspects—cultural identity, social change, and popular religion—have to be taken into consideration when one develops a truly contextual theology. This need to include and balance each of these elements, along with the elements of scripture and tradition, is why the word contextualisation might be considered the best way of describing the process that has also been called inculturation, indigenisation, or incarnation of the gospel. As the members of *The Theological Education Fund* wrote when the term was introduced in 1972, the term contextualisation includes all that is implied in the older indigenisation or inculturation, but seeks also to include the realities of contemporary secularity, technology and the struggle for human justice. One could also say that it includes the need to respect and deal with the previous forms of theology and Christian practice that, while not native to a culture, have over the years become part of it. (2002:21)

Bevans has published a number of important works since his groundbreaking 1992 work on models of contextual theology. Recently he has written about mission as 'prophetic dialogue' as a defining construct. Arguing against an older notion of theology regarded as universally valid and universally applicable, Bevans consistently champions an understanding of theology that is emphatically specific 'to a particular place, a particular time, a particular culture' (2009:165). Understanding that all theology

³³ See Sumner (2004:183, f n.14).

³⁴ The models are called *translation, anthropological, praxis, synthetic, transcendental, and countercultural*. See Bevans (2002:37-137). In a 2009 book Bevans again cites the six models but in a more recent work Bevans no longer lists the 'transcendental model' (Bevan and Schroeder 2012:63).

is produced within a context and that no location is privileged as universal has won wide acceptance.³⁵

Formerly, theology was understood as the reflection in faith of two theological ‘sources’ or *loci theologici*: Scripture and Tradition. However, today, as we have expressed it a number of times in this book, theology also considers present human experience as a theological source or *locus theologicus*. This third source, though, is not just ‘one more ingredient in the recipe.’ Not only is experience understood as equal to Scripture and Tradition; in a certain sense it has priority over them. (2009:165)

Angie Pears (*Doing Contextual Theology*, 2010) describes Bevans’ book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, as groundbreaking in the field of contextual theology. She concludes that he maps out his models along a spectrum from conservative to radical, thus enabling him to account for all types of Christian theology. She notes that Bevans acknowledges that many readers have found the transcendental model abstract and difficult. Pears goes on to consider liberation theologies, ‘feminist informed’ theologies, and postcolonial theologies as examples of contextual theologizing. She follows Bevans in describing contextual theology as ‘that theology which *explicitly* places the recognition of the contextual nature of theology at the forefront of the theological process’ (Pears 2010:1-6).³⁶ I agree with Pears that Bevans’s work has highlighted the contextual nature of all theological efforts and the need to both understand and appreciate different theology done in different contexts.

2.4.2 Robert Schreiter and Local Theologies

Schreiter, a Roman Catholic colleague of Bevans at Catholic Theological Union³⁷, ranges over the spectrum of gospel and culture terminology in writing about inculturation, contextual theology, contextualisation, and intercultural theology. He contends that contextualisation is the preferred term in Protestant circles. He introduces a new phrase into the gospel and culture lexicon, arguing that inculturation presses the

³⁵ See Newbigin 1989:142, Bosch 1991:427, and Skreslet 2012:90.

³⁶ Emphasis is original.

³⁷ Located in Chicago, Illinois (United States).

need for various Christian communities to construct ‘local theologies’ (Schreiter 1985:6). Schreiter believes that the development of local theologies has produced a greater sensitivity to the dimensions of theology in four areas. The first is that ‘local theologies are attuned to the contexts in which they arise.’ (Schreiter 2002b:vii) This is necessary because of theology’s failings. Some theologizing emphasises academic matters and does not address ‘local’ questions and thus seems out of place. A second concern is that ‘the addressees of the theology also come more into focus;’ a third is that local theologies ‘make us aware of who is doing the theology by identifying the agents doing theology.’ Finally, local theologies ‘have made us attend to the methods involved in doing theology’ (2002b:vii-viii). Schreiter concludes:

They have attuned us to the mix of experience, of cultures, of tradition, of quests for identity, and of the need to address social change. Local theologies, for this reason, seek somewhat different canons or criteria for authenticity, since generalization or universalization is not their primary focus. (2002b:vii-viii)

Schreiter believes that the early focus of inculturation was upon identity in non-western cultures.³⁸ The term contextualisation has included social concerns about liberation and postcolonial thought. Schreiter followed his work on local theology with a work on ‘the new catholicity’ that sought to articulate theological concerns in dialogue between between the global and local contexts.³⁹ Schreiter traces the various meanings of catholicity that he characterizes as ‘fullness and orthodoxy, of extendedness and even identification with Empire, of juridical bond and conformity, of the partial and visible manifestation of the completeness and to-be-revealed lordship of Christ’ (Schreiter 1997:121-2). More recently Schreiter has described catholicity as a theological way of imagining the Christian church in its wholeness, but also as a whole at this point in

³⁸ Bediako’s work on ‘theology and identity’ fits this description. Bediako’s generation of African theologians are sometimes labeled ‘cultural theologians’ whereas subsequent African theologians are linked to justice and political issues. Cf T. Maleluke 1997b: 4-23.

³⁹ Schreiter has written a number of articles and essays touching on globalisation. He discusses globalisation as a ‘phenomenon [that] revolves around two axes’. One axis is connectedness and the other is an understanding of space as an organising element rather than time. He avers that space is both compressed and deterritorialized (Schreiter 2001:124-7).

time. He describes this ‘new catholicity’ and its interaction with globalisation, the extension of a worldwide church, and the postmodern condition. A new dimension of catholicity is needed, one of ‘communication and exchange’ (Schreiter 2002a:13-16, 29-31), that holds on to a universal understanding of Christian faith in the wake of globalised concepts of culture and resultant identity formations that change boundaries, or hybridities.⁴⁰

Schreiter identifies two key issues about the dynamics of culture in light of the gospel being introduced to a new context. One key issue is the question of where the missionary begins in interpreting the gospel. Does the interpreter begin with the gospel and work to insert it into a new setting, or does the interpreter begin with a given cultural setting and indwell this setting in order to prepare it to receive the gospel? Schreiter identifies the two poles of the spectrum as ‘inculturation of faith’ versus ‘identification with culture’.⁴¹

Schreiter’s second issue concerns identifying criteria for evaluating inculturation. This has to do with limits or boundaries between an emphasis on incarnation, whereby one becomes embedded in a culture, versus an emphasis on the necessity of conversion, which is the change of mind occasioned by embracing the gospel (Schreiter 1999:68-70). Schreiter admits that some contextual expressions of the gospel betray the integrity of the gospel and discusses the issue of syncretism in *Constructing Local Theologies* (1985:95ff). For Schreiter, syncretism need not be a pejorative term but can function as a synonym for synthesis. Both syncretism and synthesis represent attempts to form religious identities. Schreiter cites Manuel Marzal, who declares, ‘syncretism is the other face of inculturation’ (Schreiter 1997:83).

⁴⁰ Schreiter does balance his emphasis on the contextual and the local with explorations of catholicity and authentic Christian identity. He offers several criteria for evaluating what may be embraced or rejected in a theological approach to culture. One criterion is how the proposal squares with scripture and tradition. He adds a caveat regarding development: ‘what constitutes legitimate development in the articulation of faith?’ (Schreiter 1997:82).

⁴¹ Schreiter refers to both ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’. He also refers to contextual theology and local theology. My translation model highlights three poles: source, receptor and witness. Thus, a third ‘starting point possibility’ is to begin with the witness or missionary who functions as a translator.

Bevans' typology of contextual models links Schreiter's contextual approach to the 'synthetic model'. He labels Schreiter's work as 'semiotic' and very complex (Bevans 2002:91-4). I concur that Schreiter does turn to linguistic theory in general and to Noam Chomsky's 'generative grammar' approach in particular.⁴² Tradition is for Schreiter a type of language system whose grammar is dynamic. Thus, a series of local theologies may be considered as tradition. I prefer regarding tradition as 'a sociocultural memory' that integrates and makes sense of various local theologies (Bergmann 2003:57). Polanyi's notion of scientists working in an ongoing conversation to test ideas by appealing to universal intent is helpful here. Local theologies arising from local traditions interact with one another and create catholicity in dialogue. Schreiter seems to envision a healthy give and take between past and present theologies but keeps the content of tradition open.

I find Schreiter's treatment of contextualisation (inculturation) as more nuanced in the attention paid to scripture and tradition than that in Bevans' corpus. Schreiter concentrates more on concepts of culture, hermeneutics, and semiotics than Bevans. On the other hand, Bevans writes from the perspective of Christian history and systematic theology. My preliminary finding is, however, that both Bevans and Schreiter emphasise the local and the contextual in charting the hermeneutical equation.

The question of agency may serve to highlight a salient development in understandings of inculturation and contextualisation. Both Bevans who emphasises the role of 'present experience' and Schreiter who champions 'local theologies' underscore the crucial role to be played by indigenous Christians in the missionary enterprise. C. Sedmak affirms that 'theology is done locally. In order to be honest to the local circumstances theology has to be done as local theology, as theology that takes the particular situation seriously...' (Sedmak 2002:95-6). Of course an outsider missionary

⁴² See S. Bermann's discussion of Paul Tillich, David Tracy and Noam Chomsky as influences upon Schreiter (2003:49-66). See Bevans' sketch of the synthetic model that traces similar influences upon Schreiter (2002:88-102).

agent can take the local context seriously but only as she indwells that context. Bevans seems to disagree, contending that ‘other questions cluster around the *agents* of contextualisation. Can theologians outside the context do genuine contextual theology? Can professional theologians adequately represent grassroots folk?’ (Bevans 2009:168). Shorter declares, ‘Missionaries cannot carry out inculturation. They are merely at the start of the process. They listen, stimulate and canalize’ (Shorter 1988:247). It appears that the older term, ‘indigenisation,’ *prima facie*, actually carries a more obvious reference to indigenous agency than either inculturation or contextualisation.⁴³ Any of these terms, of course, can be used to describe what outside missionaries seek to do: they inculturate or contextualise or indigenise the gospel in their efforts at to carry Good News into a new setting. It is my sense, however, that it is the term ‘contextualisation’ that represents a greater emphasis on local theologians and indigenous Christians charting their own way in communicating the gospel and doing theology.⁴⁴

2.5 Preliminary Conclusions

2.5.1 Current Terms and Trends

In the last decade, American missiologists belonging to the evangelical tradition have written extensively about contextualisation. Anthropologist Charles Kraft offers a new term in his 2005 book, *Appropriate Christianity*. Kraft treats the subject of contextualisation under the criterion of ‘appropriateness’. ‘Appropriate Christianity’ is offered as a balancing construct where a person involved in contextualising the gospel

⁴³ In a private conversation mission historian Thomas G. Oey explains his preference for yet a new term, trans-localization, to capture the complexities of missionaries communicating the gospel across two or more cultures and contexts (24 February 2014). According to Oey, ‘Translocalization represents comparative multinational, multid denominational, multilingual, and regional thematic inquiry of diverse actors and locations. Incipient indigenization is proposed as an intermediate stage between enactment and full indigenization (indigenous transformation), in which the frustrations of indigenous actors are identified’ (T. Oey, ‘Translocalization and Incipient Indigenization: A Comparative Cultural History of Java and the West, 1814-1847’; forthcoming).

⁴⁴ Skreslet concludes that the language of contextualisation marks a shift in emphasis from the missionary and the professional theologian to the local church and indigenous communities (Skreslet 2102:88).

seeks to be appropriate with regard to both the gospel and the culture in view. The term ‘appropriate’ is ambiguous, however, and Kraft’s attempt to introduce it as a categorical descriptor has not gained any traction to date in missiological literature.

Scott Moreau has produced a missiological textbook that maps various evangelical approaches to contextualisation. He states his appreciation for Bevans’ models but seeks to develop a ‘supplemental map of evangelical models of contextualization’ (Moreau 2012:13). Moreau cites many evangelical missiologists but particularly emphasises the works of Kraft and Paul Hiebert. Moreau is careful to emphasise the Bible as normative for Christian faith while offering some nuanced comments about hermeneutics, language, and meaning. The evangelical models seek a balancing stance between gospel texts and cultural contexts but do seem to conform to Bevans’ assessment of them as belonging to either his translation model or his countercultural model.⁴⁵ I appreciate Moreau’s faith claims about Scripture’s authority but wonder if ‘contextualisation’ has too much history and too many layers of meaning to serve him and his Evangelical constituency. Conciliar theologians and Roman Catholic spokespersons, particularly Bevans and Schreiter, have mapped ‘contextualisation’ in ways that set the agenda in mission studies today.

The adjective ‘intercultural’ is gaining favour to describe more than one culture or multiple cultural perspectives interacting and mutually influencing each other. Walter Hollenweger comments that, because all theologies are contextually conditioned there can be and should be intercultural dialogue among representatives of multiple Christian communities. He refers to dialogical theology done in creative tension among various voices to be intercultural theology.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ I find that these Evangelical missiologists emphasise the scriptural sources of the Christian gospel over and above the contextual particularities. Thus, their models fail to strike a balance by emphasising the source even as their Roman Catholic mission colleagues miss the balance by preferring the contextual.

⁴⁶ See *Intercultural Theology: Essays in honour of Jan Jongeneel* edited by Martha Frederiks, et al. (2003).

Mission Studies, the journal of the *International Association for Mission Studies*, devoted a portion of a 2008 volume to a conversation on ‘intercultural theology.’ Dieter Becker, Chair of the German Association for Mission Studies, offers a definition that extends ‘intercultural’ beyond an ecumenical discussion within Christian mission circles to the world of inter-religious relationships and dialogue:

It is the task of Intercultural Theology/Mission Studies to theologially reflect on the interaction between Christianity and non-Christian religions and worldviews and also on the resulting transformation processes activated in various cultural contexts. (Becker 2008:107)

In the same volume (*Mission Studies* 25:1, 2008), three scholars express reservations about replacing ‘mission studies’ with ‘intercultural theology’.

In volume 26 of *Mission Studies* (2008), Werner Ustorf contributes an article titled ‘The Cultural Origins of Intercultural Theology’. Ustorf traces the history of usage of the term ‘mission studies’ and cites Fuller Theological Seminary’s decision to change the name of its ‘School of World Mission’ to that of ‘School of Intercultural Studies’. My conversation with Scott Sunquist, the Dean of Fuller’s ‘School of Intercultural Studies’, indicates that the change had more to do with helping graduates serve in sensitive areas of the world without wearing an academic tag reading ‘mission’.⁴⁷ Ustorf claims that the term ‘intercultural’ has been widely accepted in western theology but gives few examples. He references Bosch who acknowledges differences of theological perspective manifest with the terms, ‘interculturally’, ‘cross-culturally’, and ‘contextually’. Stan Skreslet comments positively, ‘this new term expresses a desire for theology to engage the whole of what is now a global community.’ He also concludes negatively, ‘intercultural theology represents a defensive response to the ambivalence many Western Christians feel about some past practices and theologies of mission’ (Skreslet 2012:67-8). Ross Langmead sees ‘intercultural theology’ gaining traction in European universities as a missiological category but concludes that the term is not

⁴⁷ Personal conversation with Scott Sunquist on 20 March 2013. Sunquist serves as Dean of Fuller’s School of Intercultural Studies.

comprehensive enough to cover the scope of missiology (Langmead 2014:68). I conclude that the term ‘intercultural theology’ shows promise for wider usage but currently has minority status.⁴⁸

Skreslet offers an evaluation of the historical process in which mission thinkers pay attention to culture under the heading, ‘From Incarnation to Contextualization’ (Skreslet 2012:60). He gives credit to historians and ethnographers for moving contextual studies to a more rigorously academic level. I agree with his observation that the term ‘inculturation’ has given way to ‘contextualization’.⁴⁹ Skreslet cites several factors for the growth of contextual theology: the experience of indigenous communities, the postcolonial emergence of world Christianity in the 1970s, the influence of liberation theology featuring the English and Spanish versions of Gustavo Gutierrez’s *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, and the burgeoning collection of Third World theologies (Skreslet 2012:62-3). Daniel Shaw, in an article titled ‘Beyond Contextualization: Toward a Twenty-first-Century Model for Enabling Mission,’ retains the term ‘contextualization’ but argues for a new model that emphasises process over the product. Shaw believes that in Relevance Theory (RT) mission thinkers may find such a paradigm; he suggests RT is not only a theory of communication but also a philosophy pertaining to human relationships.⁵⁰

2.5.2 Preliminary Critique of Terms and Trends

The history of the debate regarding ‘culture’ and ‘context’ terminology suggests that inculturation has been favoured in Roman Catholic missiology. Contextualisation is gaining wide acceptance among Protestants and Roman Catholics and takes a more

⁴⁸ Skreslet reports that three pioneers of intercultural theology, Hans Jochen Margull, Walter Hollenweger, and Richard Vriedli, launched a book series in 1975 titled *Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity*, and the series now numbers more than 150 volumes (2012:68).

⁴⁹ Gregory J. Liston analysed three missiological journals for the period 2003-7 and concluded that of the 302 total articles included in these journals, 53 articles had as their subject, ‘contextualisation.’ In second place was the topic, ‘Missions’ organizations,’ totaling 33. See Liston 2010:215-6.

⁵⁰ Shaw 2010:208-15. I will comment on RT in Chapter Three.

critical or prophetic stance towards culture than the concept of inculturation (Kirk 1999:91).⁵¹ Bosch describes ‘mission as contextualization’ as an affirmation that ‘God has turned toward the world’ (Bosch 1991:426). Angie Pears supports this idea by noting the concern about justice for liberation theologies in particular, and thus for the range of contextual theologies. Such contextual emphases include ‘God’s preferential option for the poor’, highlighted by Gutierrez and James Cone’s emphasis on God’s concern for the oppressed (Pears 2010:176-8). Mark Shaw groups the older term ‘indigenisation’ alongside contextualisation and inculturation and refers to all three as ‘clumsy terms’ (Shaw 2010:21). At the same time, he argues that each term represents a unique point of emphasis. He links ‘indigenisation’ to the ‘people factor’ highlighting the threshold of new people coming to faith, coming into leadership, and coming to power through global revivals.⁵² The ‘faith factor’ is associated with ‘inculturation’ as new believers hear the gospel at a deeper level. Finally, Shaw agrees with Kirk and Pears that contextualisation represents the ‘justice factor’. Because revivals cause change, these resulting new movements become a way of breaking racial, tribal, and ethnic boundaries (Shaw 2010:21-4). I have signalled that contextualisation also serves to articulate and promote indigenous agency. Ogbu Kalu asserts that ‘the history of Christianity in Africa is not only what missionaries did or did not do but also what Africans thought about what was going on and how they responded’ (Kalu cited in Thomas 2012:128).

George Sumner compares the contextualising works of Kraft and Schreiter in the chapter ‘Testing Final Primacy among Theologies of Inculturation’ that appears in his

⁵¹ A classic but older work on contextualisation is by David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, titled *Contextualisation: Meanings, Methods and Models* (1989). A more contemporary work explores examples of contextualisation in the New Testament documents: Dean Flemming’s *Contextualisation in the New Testament: Patterns for Theology and Mission* (2004).

⁵² Shaw’s comments are part of a book (2010) on revival movements that is subtitled, ‘How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution.’

2004 book.⁵³ Sumner is keen to evaluate how each scholar appeals to scripture, tradition, and the culture of the local environment in order to express the Christian faith. He concludes that both Kraft (Protestant/Evangelical) and Schreiter (Roman Catholic) negotiate the comparative weight of these factors according to their respective theological traditions. Sumner contends that these exemplars and most theoreticians of contextualisation are reticent to articulate the parameters of the tradition because of a desire to respect creativity expressed in new settings. I concur that the tension between expressing the tradition in ways both creative and authentic in new contexts shows up in establishing identity boundaries (Sumner 2004:178, 184).

Kevin Vanhoozer, a Protestant theologian, reflects on contextualisation from the perspective of theological method in an era of World Christianity. He acknowledges that non-western theologies question ‘the form, content, and categories [of western theology] that have become the default setting of academic theology’ (Vanhoozer 2006:89). He echoes Kwame Bediako and refers to Schreiter by suggesting that theology ought to borrow from primal religions as readily as early Christian thinkers did from Plato. Vanhoozer proceeds cautiously, however, in wondering about the wisdom of uncritical syncretism and theological ethnification. He argues that theology involves both context and text and invokes a principle akin to Sumner’s final primacy. Vanhoozer calls it ‘the canonic principle: the story of Jesus as the church’s authoritative script’ and applauds Schreiter’s recognition that the single most urgent question facing local theologies today is how to discern what is genuinely Christian and what is not (Vanhoozer 2006:108, 112, 122).

2.6 Translation and the Need for a Balancing Construct

⁵³ *The First and the Last: The Claim of Jesus Christ and the Claims of Other Religious Traditions.*

Having described the use of other terminology, I now survey the parameters of translation as used by several scholars of mission history.⁵⁴ The conceptualisation of ‘mission as translation’ appears prominently in the literary corpus of historians Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh. The related ideas of ‘translatability’ and ‘identity’ are themes in the work of Walls’ disciple, Kwame Bediako. I find translation as a concept to be distinct from the terms ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’ for at least three reasons. First, Andrew Walls and Lamin Sanneh employ the translation concept primarily as a way of describing episodes of gospel transmission throughout Christian history. Their ‘translation metaphor’ is used to describe Christian history and appears to function as an incipient interpretive framework. Theologian Kwame Bediako’s work on identity and Christian Africa fits into this same framework. Walls and Sanneh study episodes and periods of Christian history by paying particular attention to how the Christian gospel is transmitted into new contexts. Walls declares, ‘Christian faith rests upon a divine act of translation: the Word became flesh and dwelt among us’ (John 1:14).⁵⁵ The initial act of translation, namely the Incarnation, spawned a successive history of subsequent translations. From Jerusalem to Antioch to Athens to Rome and beyond, the gospel has been translated into the world’s diverse cultures (Walls 1996:26-8).

Secondly, ‘translation’ focuses attention on the threshold aspect of a missionary bringing the gospel that makes contact with a new setting or community. Translation describes well what happens when the gospel is inserted into a new setting. The gospel is introduced as a new or even an alien set of ideas, and if it is received, then it must be apprehended in terms and categories known to the recipients. Once the gospel has taken root in new soil, the developmental task of expressing this gospel in culturally

⁵⁴ The English word ‘translate’ derives etymologically from the Latin word *translatus* that means ‘carry across.’ Thus, it has the extended meaning of transport or transfer of something from one place or condition to another. Translation is used frequently to indicate the turning or transfer of words or symbols from one system into another. It may mean linguistically to express an utterance in different words.

⁵⁵ Walls asserts that that incarnation was a matter of ‘divinity translated into humanity, as though humanity were a receptor language’ (1996:26-8).

appropriate ways may be described more narrowly as ‘local theology’ or ‘contextual theology.’ The initial contact brings two worldviews, two narratives, and two languages face to face. For the gospel to take root, the receptor culture must accept the message from the transmitting source and begin to make sense of it. At the threshold boundary between contexts or cultures, translation of the Christian gospel invites humans to receive something new and to experience conversion. Conversion, which is more than substituting a new allegiance for an old one, implies transformation of individuals and settings (Walls 1996:28).

Thirdly, the concept of ‘mission as translation’ has rich roots in the linguistic world of translation. Translation of texts, including Bible translation, has generated a complex world of translation theory and translation methodology.⁵⁶ In the history of language translation, emphasis has been given to understanding the authorial source, but much attention also is paid to the language and customs of a receptor people. Eugene Nida, the pioneer Bible translator, posits a communication model that includes a source, a messenger, and a receptor. He also points out that the messenger should take account of the assumptions she explicitly or unwittingly brings to the translation effort. Nida’s concern for balancing both fidelity to the source and meaningfulness for the receptor is at the root of his translation philosophy, known as the theory of dynamic equivalence.⁵⁷

The primary aim of this research project is to consider the benefits of conceptualising the hermeneutical task of mission in terms of ‘translation’. I am testing this idea for its power to contribute to missiological discourse an effective construct regarding the engagement of the Christian gospel with various cultures and contexts. The discourse of contextualisation and inculturation represents a pendulum that has swung in the direction toward emphatically paying attention to cultural contexts. Thus, at the same time, the discourse runs the risk of paying lesser attention to understanding the gospel,

⁵⁶ See Edward Sapir, Benjamin Whorf, and Roman Jakobson in Bassnett (2002:13-14).

⁵⁷ Nida has authored many books on translation. See Nida and Reyburn (1981:5-32).

as it is revealed in the Bible, as the definitive source text for the Christian gospel. The terms, ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’, *prima facie* give priority attention to cultures and contexts. Why has such a concern about new contexts receiving the gospel come to represent what I argue is an unbalanced approach that prefers the context? What has occasioned this purported pendulum shift? I offer the following five reasons:

1. Liberation theologies and postcolonial concerns have arisen within the church to redress past imbalances demonstrated by mission societies, theologians and missionaries in failing adequately to appreciate new settings and indigenous peoples. Western academic theology, according to Orlando Costas, became known for its abstractness as it reflected upon ideas and doctrines apart from addressing concrete problems. These western theologies, undergirding the modern missionary movement, are criticised for being universalising theologies. Conversely Latin American theologies sought to liberate theology from its ivory-tower imprisonment and link it to *praxis* (practice) (Costas 1982:126-7). The resulting concern for the local/contextual recognises the story of western dominance in mission theologies and now focuses attention on emerging theologies from younger churches. Bosch explains that the Enlightenment and its concomitant scientific advances put the Western world at an ‘unparalleled advantage over the rest of the world.’ Western nations had tools and technology that led them to see themselves as superior and the line between religion and culture was blurred. Bosch cites William R. Hutchison who claims that the ‘Christian West’ sought to impose its views on others and thus displayed a ‘consensus so fundamental that it operated mainly at the unconscious, presuppositional level’ (Bosch 1991:291-2). Bosch concludes that western missions were guilty of ethnocentrism and largely failed to appreciate the receptor cultures.⁵⁸ Given this legacy of failing to understand local cultures, failing adequately to express gospel verities, and failing to demonstrate kingdom priorities in

⁵⁸ Bosch qualifies his criticism of the Enlightenment missions by observing individual exceptions and the admission that all missionaries come in the robes of their own culture both for good and for ill (1991:291-2).

ways understandable to people in receptor contexts, it is plausible that mission theorists and practitioners would bend over backward to pay more attention to local contexts.

2. A second reason is the growing recognition of the enormous variety of languages and cultural contexts in the twenty-first-century world. The scholarly study of cultures by social scientists has led both anthropologists and missiologists to conduct analyses of the various contexts where the church has been planted (Schreiter 1985:2-3). The enormous demographic shift in Christian populations at the end of the twentieth century has signalled a new phase of western Christian missions taking more seriously the younger churches of the southern hemisphere.⁵⁹ The missiological and anthropological literature shows a growing awareness of faith communities and their contexts becoming understood outside their own geographical regions.

3. Another reason for the pendulum shift is the proper need to do contextual theology in local settings that leads some theologians, such as Stephan Bevans, to regard ‘the context’ as a privileged source of theology. Bevans views matters of context or experience as primary rather than complementary or even secondary to scripture and tradition.⁶⁰ Why does Bevans apparently minimise the authoritative status traditionally accorded to Scripture (and tradition) and invite context or present experience to ascend the throne? This statement offers a partial answer. ‘What we realize today is that our experience in the present—interpreting and interpreted by our biblical and doctrinal

⁵⁹ In their *Atlas of Global Christianity*, Johnson and Ross discuss in essays and display with maps the enormous demographic shift in Christian populations from 1910-2010. They claim, ‘Whereas, in 1910, 80% of all Christians were Europeans or North Americans, by 2010 only 45% of all Christians are from the Global North’ (2009:x).

⁶⁰ Bevans describes what he calls classical theology as a conceptualisation of theology as ‘a kind of objective science of faith’ that was understood as a reflection in faith on the two *logici theologici* of scripture and tradition, ‘the content of which has not and never will be changed’ and is situated above culturally and historically conditioned expressions. Theology that is described as contextual, says Bevans, deliberately analyses that ‘culture, history and contemporary thought forms’ must be counted, alongside scripture and tradition, as ‘valid sources of theology.’ Bevans sums up this view’s import by asserting, ‘Indeed, when we say that there are three sources for theology, we are not just adding context as a third element; we are changing the whole equation’ (Bevans 1992:3-5). In a more recent volume Bevans goes on to declare, ‘Not only is experience understood as equal to Scripture and Tradition; in a certain sense it has priority over them.’ ‘Contextual theology takes into account the experience of the past (experience of our ancestors in the faith recorded in Scripture and the doctrinal Tradition both as a source and as a parameter for theologizing) and it takes into account the experience of the present or, in other words, the context in which Christians of a concrete time and place find themselves’ (Bevans 2009:165-6).

tradition—is what ultimately validates that experience of the past’ (Bevans 2012:165). Bevans, Schroeder, and Schreiter belong to the Roman Catholic world. Perhaps Roman Catholic missiology, representing a historical burden of ecclesial traditionalism, fosters reactions against tradition and conformist sensibilities. These aforementioned Catholic missiologists explore freedom through a robust appreciation for mission contexts.⁶¹

4. A postmodern sensibility exerts influence upon both Western and southern hemisphere articulations of the gospel. The concerns of modernity and postmodernity raise epistemological questions highlighted by the modern turn to the subjective and the postmodern turn to language. (Bevans 1992:2). This is a ‘philosophical reason’ for the undue attention given to receptor contexts. In Chapter Five, I will show how Polanyi’s philosophical ideas can help missiologists to recognise the importance of the knowing subject in relation to objective data.

5. The elements of globalisation cause cultural change and intercultural dynamics to be ever more complex. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, astounding improvements in telecommunication technologies bring news and information about all paves to virtually every place that is wired. The proliferation of the English language as a business, diplomatic, media, and academic lingua franca promotes both shared knowledge and a shared way of conversing about these data. *Google* and other search engine technologies bring pieces of information instantly to those with access to computers and the Internet. These globalising streams of influence likely will cause missiologists to study the world in smaller and smaller micro contexts. A concomitant danger is that globalisation may cause missiologists to focus on particulars at the expense of universals (Kim and Kim 2008:219). Because globalisation represents an interactive sequence of rapid changes occurring throughout the world, contextual

⁶¹ Protestant theologians also promote progressive viewpoints and emphasise contextual theology. Cf. the works of John Hick, Don Cupitt, Sallie McFague, Justo Gonzalez and Douglas John Hall.

theologies may find it natural to emphasise what is new and dynamic rather than what is static or enduring.

I move to test an alternative construct, missional translation, to determine if this metaphor provides an approach to gospel communication that contributes insights and stimulates new discussions about Christian mission and contextual themes. I believe one can build a conceptualisation of translation that learns from the histories and usages of related terms. I propose borrowing and adapting the good features of contextualisation in the construct of translation without retaining its weaknesses. My preliminary sense is that the work of Walls and Sanneh primarily, and Bediako's achievement secondarily, presents a translation principle that guides missionaries and theologians to value the gospel as primary source, esteem the cultures where it is inserted as a result of missionary activity, and value the new translations of Christian faith that developed after the gospel was received. The correlation between Christian mission and the revitalisation of indigenous culture, according to these scholars, is an under valued theme in chronicling Christian expression.⁶²

⁶² I offer a fuller treatment of ideas articulated by Walls, Sanneh and Bediako in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER THREE

The Linguistic Roots of Translation

3.1 Introduction

Locating the term ‘translation’ ordinarily bids one to begin with language and literary studies. As richly illustrated by the biblical story of Babel, human cultures have been characterized by a profusion of languages. The Babel story offers a biblical account of multiple languages spoken on one planet. God, whom Israel knew as Yahweh, scattered the human creatures and confused their languages as an act of judgment in response to their tower building hubris (Genesis 11:1-9). Although humans are distinguished from the other creatures by a facility with language, the ability to communicate becomes frustrated by cultural and language barriers. Communication proves not to be futile but difficult, creating an on-going need for translation whenever speakers belonging to different language traditions seek to communicate with each other.

George Steiner postulates that every act of communication requires some form of translation and that sending and receiving communication messages requires deciphering to achieve meaning. He argues, ‘To understand is to decipher’ and ‘to hear significance is to translate.’ Steiner describes translation in the larger sense as arising when two languages meet (1992:xii). How do speakers of one language hear and receive messages from speakers of other languages? Are all languages similar in some ways and simultaneously different in other ways? Is it possible for speakers truly to be bilingual or multilingual? The history of the practice of language translation testifies to the enduring abilities and efforts of women and men to speak and write in order to communicate across languages.

In 1957 the linguist Martin Joos concluded after decades of research that human languages span a wide diverse spectrum and declared, ‘languages could differ from each other without limit and in unpredictable ways’ (Pinker 1994:231-2). In the same year another linguist, Noam Chomsky, published his revolutionary work, *Syntactic Structures*. Chomsky’s approach claims that despite linguistic variety, language universals exist in the domain of syntax (Sampson 1980:131).

The related themes of difference and similarity occupy the poles of language translation. Because languages evince similarity, translation is possible; because languages exhibit a wide range of differences, translation is difficult. Stefano Arduini comments that the themes of similarity and difference resound throughout the emerging discipline of translation studies and within related fields of study. These disciplines include: Bible translation, biblical studies, anthropology, cultural studies, semiotics, metaphor studies, philology, and cognitive sciences (Arduini and Hodgson 2004:8).

The primary argument of this thesis offers ‘translation’ as a conceptual category and metaphor, for communicating the set of ideas and practices that persons embody and employ in order to express the Christian gospel in a cultural setting and to an audience different from the translators’ primary culture.¹ Mapping this more comprehensive conceptual notion of translation relies in some respects on linguistic and literary translation. In linguistics and translation studies scholars examine how languages function and how messages can be transmitted between languages. Philosophy of language and hermeneutics are disciplines concerned with theories of meaning, authorial intention, language use, and the function of metaphor. All of these ‘language’ subjects inform translation theory and practice. I briefly survey developments in linguistics, hermeneutics, philosophy, and translation studies that are helpful in articulating conceptual translation of Christian mission.

¹ In her introduction to Daniel Shaw’s exploration of culture and translation (Shaw 1988:ix), Mildred L. Larson asserts, ‘Translation is not only a formal linguistic matter; it is intimately related to everyday life and culture, into the total worldview of the people who speak the source and receptor languages.’

3.2 Describing Linguistics

Linguistics is the scientific study of human language. As a discipline linguistics influences and is influenced by philosophy and logic, speech science and technology, computer science and artificial intelligence, and the study of cognition. It includes the fields of socio-linguistics, historical linguistics, and computational linguistics; and contains the sub-disciplines of phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and psycholinguistics (MIT Linguistics Department, web.mit.edu/linguistics/).

Geoffrey Sampson claims that around 1900 a turning point in the modern study of languages and linguistics occurred, shifting study from the nineteenth-century interests in historical linguistics, diachronic linguistics, and philology to the study of synchronic linguistics. Synchronic or descriptivist linguistics seeks to offer a static description of a language with respect to its phonology and morphology and syntax and semantics without prescriptive (value) judgments. While nineteenth-century linguistic research investigated the history of particular languages and attempted to reconstruct lost proto-languages, twentieth-century emphasis is on contemporary manifestation of language and analysis of communicative systems.²

Two members of the descriptivist school of linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, studied the relationship of language and thought. They asked, does language determine thought or does thought exist independent of language. Whorf believed both overt and covert categories exist in language. If the ‘real world is unconsciously built upon the language habits of the group’, then categories such as number, gender, case, and tense are not so much discovered in experience as imposed by the hold that linguistic form exerts upon an individual’s orientation in the world.

² Sampson argues that nineteenth century philologists borrowed schema or paradigms from mechanistic physics and biology to construct models of languages that accounted for sounds, language development, and relationships among languages (1980: 13ff). See also O’Grady et al (1996:1-15) and Hirschberg and Hirschberg (1999:613).

This so-called hypothesis never appeared in definitive form in the published works of either scholar but has been inferred from their academic output in two forms. A strong version of the hypothesis is sometimes referred to as ‘linguistic determinism’ and proposes that the forms of language are prior to and determinative of the forms of knowledge and understanding.³ The weak form is referred to as ‘linguistic relativity’ and suggests that no a priori constraints on the meanings that a human language might encode exist, but that these encodings shape unreflective understanding by speakers of a language. The determinism view has been largely discredited but the weaker form of the hypothesis continues to carry influence.

Language categorises reality, orders experience, and helps people make sense of the world. Linguistic codes embody worldviews and ideologies (Adams 2000:28). John Ellis argues for a weak version of Sapir-Whorf that considers language use as a form of thought rather than an influence upon it.⁴ He contends that the heart of language is categorisation. David Katan agrees that it is generally accepted that humans do organise perceptions in terms of predefined categories (1999:79-83). This means, in one sense, a reduction of the variety of experiences. To categorise an action, an expression or an experience necessarily involves simplification and therefore a reduction of uniqueness and diversity to a finite number of types. Categorisation brings with it the twin dangers of building too many or too few categories (Ellis 1993:60-63).

Linguistic categories, contends Ellis, primarily are the reflection of the collective purposes of the speakers of a language rather than the direct reflections of the structure of the world. Ellis’s view is consonant with Fowler’s thesis that language categorises

³ One criticism of the determinism view objects that translators and interpreters would be prisoners of their primary languages and incapable of conceptualising and articulating in categories that belong to other languages. Accepting the strong version of the hypothesis, therefore, would mean that we can only think what our language allows (Katan 1999:74-89).

⁴ Roger Fowler also subscribes to a version of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis with an eye on the social function of language in established categories. ‘Whorf’s claim that language determines the categories of thought can be accepted so long as we qualify the argument somewhat: the semantic categories are not simply properties of the language, but products of the society in which the language is molded’ (Fowler 1986:33).

reality and helps people make sense of the world. Ellis argues that functional differentiation is the basis of the categories and names a host of thinkers who have contributed to this view, such as de Saussure, Charles Peirce, Sapir and Whorf, and Ludwig Wittgenstein (Ellis 1993:38-42).⁵

Thus, a language is a unique, highly complex, ordered contingent system that enables speakers to conceptualise experience and to communicate with other speakers. An understanding of the system of categorising is determined by the purposes of the categorisers; hence, different languages exhibit different categories and ideas. Information is sorted and processed via the act of categorisation. Information and ideas and communication and reference presuppose the existence of a language. Encoding requires a code of signs or a language. But something occurs prior to the coding and the communication. Conceptualisation or categorisation occurs first and is, therefore, the most basic process of language. In this view ‘reference’ does not explain language but pertains to a use of language (Ellis 1993:115-19). Hence, de Saussure comments helpfully about ‘assigning proper place’ (Culler 1986:28-39).

This thesis assumes that language has a double function: it enables speakers to conceptualise ideas and experience, and language is the primary tool human beings use to communicate with each other. Conceptualisation may be logically prior to communication but it need not be assigned paramount status. The two functions are complementary.

3.3 Hermeneutics and Philosophy of Language

⁵ De Saussure pioneered in the sense of noting contrast and differentiation in discourse about language. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis reinforces this notion. Wittgenstein, invoking the example of ‘games’ to illustrate family resemblances, utilises this idea to note overlapping similarities among languages rather than a single common feature. See Ellis 1993: 38-42.

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, philosophers began studying the uses of language, the work of construing meaning, and the disciplines and processes involved in interpreting language and texts. Hermeneutics intersects with philosophy, linguistics, and biblical studies. The term ‘hermeneutics’ derives from the Greek word meaning ‘to interpret.’ The work of hermeneutics may be described simply as the enterprise of interpreting messages and texts. The exploration of the concept of translation in this thesis parallels hermeneutics. I consider translation in a broader, conceptual way for the purpose of understanding cross-cultural mission, however, my concept of translation leads me to investigate how the insights of language and text study might be applied to a notion of conceptual translation. Hermeneutics is primarily a matter of interpreting texts, however the implications of hermeneutical theory can be expanded to interpret events, circumstances, and ideas.

Several pioneers in western hermeneutical theory also appear as some of the leading western philosophers of the last two centuries. The most important theorists are Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), Hans-George Gadamer (1900-2002), and Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), who follow the earlier pioneering work of Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834). Anthony Thiselton comments that those who followed Schleiermacher’s work on hermeneutics expanded the subject by raising questions untraditional to hermeneutics and thus involving multiple disciplines, such as biblical studies, philosophy, literary studies, sociology, communication studies, and linguistics (Thiselton 2009:1).

Congruent with Schleiermacher, Gadamer moved from a primary consideration of the source in a communicative act or text to paying particular attention to the reader or community of readers. His expansion of focus helped him redefine hermeneutics as the art of understanding.⁶ Just like a translator must consider source and receptor, the

⁶ Gadamer and other continental thinkers distinguish between the more rational and critical dimension of explanation and the listening dimension of understanding (Thiselton 2009:8). Gadamer saw his hermeneutical emphasis moving philosophy away from a starting point of ‘first person certainty’

interpreter must consider both author and reader in seeking to understand communication. Both the interpreter and the translator are occupied with what the author or text transmits in addition to what the reader or community receives and understands.

Gadamer stressed the notion of pre-understanding or preliminary understanding, *Vorverstandnis*, that the reader or interpreter brings to the task of understanding a text. Prejudices need not restrict understanding but once recognised can function as a starting point for the quest after understanding (Gadamer 1990:265-300). This starting point contrasts with the Cartesian first step of doubt and the Enlightenment preference for methodology enshrined in the natural sciences. The reader seeks to bring together her personal context and the text she is considering. First Heidegger and then Gadamer used the term 'hermeneutical circle' to refer to the interaction of the 'parts and whole picture' in a process of an interpreter's understanding (1990:266).

Grant Osborne amends this idea slightly by using the phrase 'hermeneutical spiral' to indicate how an interpreter moves upward in adjusting pre-understanding in light of a growing and fuller understanding (Osborne 1991:14). The interpreter begins by anticipating ideas in order to achieve understanding by discovery through reading the text. The life-worlds or horizons of interpreter and author become connected or fused in a concentration of attention upon an idea or passage in the text. The reader expands the horizon of the text by asking questions from the perspective of the reader's historical situation. Questioning the text always brings out 'the undetermined possibilities of a thing' (Gadamer 1990:277-338). The text in turn questions the reader by challenging the anticipated ideas (pre-understanding or prejudice) that the reader has brought to an encounter with the text. Thus, the hermeneutical process is a dialogue or dialectic between pre-understanding, or *fore-understanding*, and understanding; and between an

(Gadamer 1990:238-9). See Roger Scruton's (1982:284) commentary on this shift away from Cartesian rationalism and Hume's empiricism.

empathetic reading of an author's words and a reader achieving understanding through filters of the reader's experience. A so-called disinterested reader theoretically would consider a text without prejudices but those prejudices are what the reader inevitably brings to all acts of interpretation. Hence, Gadamer's 'fusion of horizons' captures his idea of understanding by paying attention to the two sides of the whole process in communication (Thiselton 2009:3-16; Osborne 1991:369-374). French philosopher Paul Ricoeur argues similarly about hermeneutical theory when he writes; 'the illusion is not in looking for a point of departure, but in looking for it without presuppositions' (1967:348).

Gadamer also drew a contrast between abstract philosophical problems and the importance of addressing questions and issues that arise in concrete human situations. He shares Wittgenstein's appreciation of specific cases over against sweeping generalisation and refers to the ancient Roman notion of *sensus communis* (common sense) as a caution against over-reliance on 'technical' reason (Thiselton 2009:13-16; 1980: 24-40). His emphasis on the role of community in achieving understanding is complemented by Ricoeur's emphasis on the importance of 'interacting with the other'. Thus, the reader or interpreter is in a dialogue with the text and its author. This dialogue becomes richer when the reader encounters other readers past and present who also have sought to interpret the text in question. The history of interpretation helps to limit the field of possible interpretations. Ricoeur's emphasis on dialogue offers a caution to the singular interpreter inclined to deconstruct a text without any reference to other interpreters. Ricoeur envisions dialogue, debate and argument—with others.

It is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation, to confront interpretations, to arbitrate between them and to seek agreement, even if this agreement remains beyond our immediate reach. (1976:79)

Ricoeur contributes to this broadened concern for the second horizon by his work on narrative. He sees all readers and thus all interpreters as part of a narrative world created by the text where understanding can take place.⁷

The horizons of interpreters in hermeneutical inquiry are always moving and expanding and subject to fresh appraisal. Still this does not mean the absence of coherence. Ludwig Wittgenstein uses the metaphor of the nest to describe such coherence. A reader holds not a single proposition but a series or system of propositions—some are held fast and some are held loosely and some are considered and reconsidered; even a system is not entirely rigid; it is a nest of propositions (Thiselton 2009:15).

In his 2009 work, *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, Thiselton includes chapters on liberation theologies and postcolonial hermeneutics, feminist and womanist hermeneutics, reader-response and reception theory, and postmodernism and hermeneutics. These latter-day movements in hermeneutical theory all stress the importance of the second horizon or the reader in determining meaning through interpretation. This tilt toward emphasizing what the reader or community of readers brings to an encounter with a given text mirrors the emphasis in mission studies on contextual themes and inculturation. In earlier ages, an undue emphasis was given to how a source sent a message without sufficient regard on how a reception of a message had to be heard and understood in the receiver's own context. In the twenty-first century the second horizon has achieved equal status in most circles and paramount pride of place in others.

This emphasis on the second horizon has extended into philosophy as well. Late modern and postmodern thinkers in Continental and Anglo-American philosophy evince a preoccupation with language. German hermeneutics, analytic philosophy,

⁷ See the discussion of Ricoeur's writings on hermeneutics in Thiselton 2009:228-54.

deconstruction, literary theory, linguistics, and translation studies all study language use and meaning and show a turn from the object to the subject. William P. Alston observes that philosophers now concern themselves with the functions of language and study the peculiarities of poetic, religious, and moral discourse (1964:xiii-xiv, 1-9). This turn to language in late twentieth-century philosophy is defined by Richard Rorty: 'I shall mean by linguistic philosophy the view that philosophical problems are problems which may be solved or dissolved either by reforming language, or by understanding more about the language we presently use' (Rorty 1967:3).

J.L. Austin and John Searle extend the discussion with the concept of speech acts. They define a 'performative'—as an utterance of a sentence where a conventional social act is performed or accomplished, but the utterance contains no description. Therefore, language is closely related to both the intention of a speaker and the response of a hearer. Meaning is a much wider world than simply determining conditions for the truth of statements; it involves speech and the contexts of ordinary human real life situations. Paul Grice uses 'conversational implicatures' to refer to what may be implicated by a speaker. Thus, the meaning of an utterance depends on the context in which it is made, so we rely, to a certain extent, on non-linguistic factors. Thus, the philosophy of language becomes the habit of linguistic philosophers arguing against any non-linguistic method of solving philosophical problems. Andrew Kirk comments:

The philosophy of language becomes now the most serious topic for philosophy. It follows the presumption that there is no fixed meaning for the vocabularies we use. From an uncomplicated, assumed use of language, to denote objects distinct from human subjectivity, language itself now becomes problematical. Many thinkers have satisfied themselves that there is a considerable epistemic rupture between words and things ... There is now no reality apart from language, for language only refers to itself. Its' meaning is internal to itself. (2007:96)

These trends in hermeneutics and philosophy of language give evidence why scholars are fascinated with contexts. I am exploring the interest in contexts as it particularly applies to Christian mission, and look further in the disciplines of translation studies and Bible translation.

3.4 Translation Studies

A history of translation can focus on theory or practice or both. A history of theory, or discourse on translation, deals with questions such as: what have translators said about their craft/science? How have translations been evaluated at various periods and how has this discourse been related to other discourses and disciplines? (Woodsworth in Baker 1998:101-102).

Translation history has tended to emphasise literary translation. Seminal texts like *The Illiad*, *Don Quixote* or the Shakespearean corpus have spawned numerous translations and a history of evaluating those interpretations. The Bible and other sacred texts are studied as translated texts both according to the discipline of hermeneutics and as part of translation studies. General histories of translation theory, such as those by George Steiner and Susan Bassnett, presage the advent of translation studies as a discipline of its own.⁸

The mapping of translation studies is an on-going activity but the current typology is the work of James Holmes (1924-1986). His work divides the discipline into two areas: pure or 'descriptive' translation studies and applied translation studies. 'Pure translation studies' subdivides further into descriptive and theoretical studies. Reminiscent of the complexity of linguistics, this enterprise is multidisciplinary, and scholars draw upon theories and insights from other fields of study, namely, psychology, linguistics, communication theory, literary theory, anthropology, philosophy, sociology, and cultural studies (Baker 1998:277-80; Riccardi 2002:1-9).⁹

⁸ Bassnet explains that translation was for a long time regarded as belonging to the enterprise of comparative literature; in the twentieth century it was linked to linguistics and by the late twentieth century it emerged as a discipline proper. See Munday (2001) who provides a general introduction to the primary theories and schools of translation studies.

⁹ Munday offers a concise overview of the Holmes/Toury map and subsequent developments (Munday 2001:7-17). Munday lists culture-studies analysis, gender research, the Brazilian cannibalist school and

Translation proper, or ‘interlingual translation’, is to make transit from one language to another. Translators refer to translation from a source text (ST) to a target text (TT) involving a transfer of material from the source language (SL) to a target language (TL). Translation processes, however, also may be internal to a language, and they may occur between non-verbal sign systems. Roman Jakobson, in his 1959 essay ‘On Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, distinguished three types of translation: intralingual translation or rewording (interpreting verbal signs by means of other verbal signs within the same language), interlingual translation or translation proper (the work of interpreting from one language to another), and intersemiotic translation or transmutation (the interpreting of verbal signs by means of non-verbal signs and vice versa) (Petrilli 2003:17-18).

Translation proper (interlingual translation) implies interpretation. To translate is never simply ‘to decodify’ or ‘to recodify’. Such operations are part of the translation process but do not exhaust it. The work of translation is the work of interpreting and of ‘interpretation’ and gives life beyond moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription (Steiner 1975:27).

Translation theory before the twentieth century featured an on-going debate between free and literal translation. Literary scholar George Steiner describes this discussion in terms of a triad of characteristics (literal, free, and faithful translation) and highlights the concern of the translator’s fidelity to what was said or written prior to the work of translation (1975/1992:319). The debates between word-for-word (literal) and sense-for-sense (free) translations can be seen in the work of Horace and Cicero in the first century BCE and Jerome in the fourth century CE. The critiques of Cicero and Horace regarding word-for-word renderings demonstrate the orator’s goal of producing an aesthetically pleasing and creative effort in the target language. Jerome agreed: ‘Now I

postcolonial translation theory as the most recent concepts and schools. Other key persons writing or editing surveys about this discipline are Gideon Toury (*Descriptive Translation Studies and Beyond*, 1995), Mary Snell-Hornby (*Translation Studies: An Integrated Approach*, 1995), and Mona Baker (*The Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation*, 1998).

not only admit but freely announce that in translating from the Greek—except of course in the case of the Holy Scripture, where even the syntax contains a mystery—I render not word-for-word but sense-for-sense’ (Munday 2001:20).

In their surveys of the history of translation both Jeremy Munday and Mona Baker give evidence that the concern about free translation versus literal translation appears in non-western cultures as well as in European settings. They cite as evidence the history of Chinese translation of Buddhist sutras from Sanskrit and the Arabic translations of Greek scientific and philosophical texts that sometimes utilised Syriac as an intermediary language (Munday 2001:20-21; Baker 1998:320-321). Martin Luther’s translation of the New Testament (1522) and the Old Testament (1534) into East Middle German reflected another later use of the sense-for-sense translation tendency. Because Latin and the Roman Catholic Church held such sway in Europe, Luther’s idiomatic translations were strongly criticised as reflecting his reformer’s theological intents.¹⁰

In 1813 Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) wrote an influential treatise on translation titled *Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens* (On the Different Methods of Translating). Schleiermacher famously divides the translator’s task into two options. ‘Either the translator leaves the writer alone as much as possible and moves the reader towards the writer, or he leaves the reader alone as much as possible and moves the writer toward the reader’ (Schleiermacher in Munday 2001:28).

These two methods now are known in German as *Verfremdung* and *Entfremdung* and have gained currency in the English-speaking world as ‘foreignisation’ and ‘domestication.’ Schleiermacher strongly favoured the first path and ruled out the viability of a compromise or mixture of methods. To move a reader towards the author Schleiermacher suggests the translator creates a language bent towards a foreign likeness. Thus, a deliberately contrived foreignness in the translation takes seriously the

¹⁰ Luther’s translation of Romans 3:28 regarding ‘justification’ (without the work of the law but *only* through faith) included the word *allein* (alone/only) whereas the Latin translation had no equivalent word included in its version.

author's original work and creates a new work, an imitation that helps the reader understand the source and its context (Snell-Hornby 2006:9-14). Vermeer identifies four aspects of the hermeneutical theory of Schleiermacher: understanding of the utterance itself, how the utterance came into being, the immediate situation of the utterance, and how the utterance relates to the background circumstances—including those of the speaker or author (Snell-Hornby 2006:14-17).

Lawrence Venuti, an influential follower of Schleiermacher describes nineteenth-century translation history as

rooted in German literary and philosophical traditions, in Romanticism, hermeneutics and existential phenomenology. These traditions assume that language is not so much communicative as constitutive in its representation of thought and reality, and so translation is seen as an interpretation which necessarily reconstitutes and transforms the foreign text. (2000:11)

Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm von Humboldt treated translation as a creative force in which specific translation strategies might serve a variety of cultural and social functions, building languages, literatures, and nations (Venuti 2000:11; Snell-Hornby 2006:16).

In 1923 Walter Benjamin published in German a landmark essay, 'The Task of the Translator', that continues to spark discussion and debate today. Benjamin and his successors recognised that translation could be problematic when either privileging the source or the receptor. Neither an approach of 'foreignisation' nor of 'domestication' is entirely successful. The translator must pay attention to both poles and explore the complexities of the space between the two (Rendall in Venuti 2000:75-83). This is what modern Bible translators aim to accomplish. J. Ellington refers to what he terms 'Schleiermacher's dilemma' and offers an alternative approach.

Any attempt by translators to take the reader all the way to the writer is doomed to frustrate and alienate the average reader. Yet any endeavour to take the writer all the way to the reader risks trivializing the message and creating disinterest (2003:301-317).

Benjamin advocates a radical form of literalism; ‘This lies above all in the power of literalness in the translation of the syntax, and even this points to the word, not the sentence, as the translator’s original element’ (Lefevre 1977:102).

One notable twentieth-century approach introduces the notion of equivalence. The American structuralist Roman Jakobson wrote about interlingual translation using the categories of meaning and equivalence. A member of the so-called ‘Prague School’, the Russian born Jakobson and other scholars laboured in the 1920s to examine function of elements within language. In his landmark 1959 essay, ‘On the Linguistic Aspects of Translation’, Jakobson pictures translation in a semiotic sense as a transfer of signs. In the 1960s, Jiri Levy (1926-1967) followed Jakobson but went further in describing literary translation, including drama translation. Levy describes the translation process by three steps: understanding, interpreting, and transfer (Munday 2001:21-22).

Eugene Nida took the concept of equivalence further in his pioneering work among Bible translators. His 1964 work on bible translation, *Towards a Science of Translating*, explores the field of anthropology in an effort to develop scholarship to aid translators. Working with the American Bible Society brought to his attention the challenge of translating the Bible into indigenous languages for populations whose cultural frameworks were closely connected to language. If words are symbols of cultural phenomena, the translator may have difficulty exactly matching words between source language and target language. Thus, Nida introduced the concept of dynamic equivalence as distinct from formal equivalence.¹¹

Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style. (Nida and Taber 1969:12)

¹¹ Formal equivalence seeks to reproduce SL surface structures as much as possible where dynamic equivalence aims at evoking a similar response as in the source language. Famous examples of dynamic equivalent translations include ‘lamb of God’ rendered as ‘seal of God’ for the Inuit people who are unfamiliar with lambs and ‘give us this day our daily bread’ where ‘bread’ might be translated as ‘fish’ or ‘rice’ in cultures where these are the primary foods (Nida and Taber 1969:24).

The latter decades of the twentieth century and the early part of the twenty-first century have witnessed a profusion of new theories and new categories of translation studies: the translation shift approach, functional theories of translation, discourse and register analysis, systems theories, deconstruction, cultural studies or the cultural turn, the *skopos* theory, Holz-Mantarri's model of translatorial action, and a number of interdisciplinary efforts (Snell-Hornby 2006:151-169; Munday 2001:170-191). *Skopos* theory, cultural studies, and incommensurability offer insights for understanding missional translation compared to contextualisation. *Skopos* theory and cultural studies share a tendency to place a greater emphasis on the receptor text than the source text. *Skopos* theory focuses on translation as an activity with a definitive purpose and is geared to serve the intended addressee or audience of the translation, so, in this type of translation, to translate means to produce a target text in a target setting for a target purpose among a target audience of receivers. In *skopos* theory, the status of the source text is lower than the status of the source text is in equivalence-based theories of translation.

Cultural translation is being used in various disciplines, such as culture studies, anthropology, and postcolonial studies, but as yet has no underpinning theory. Gideon Toury has honed in on studying the historical variability of translation: 'difference across cultures, variation within a culture and change over time' (Toury 1995:31). Thus, a range of concepts describing translation vis-a-vis culture has been added to the vocabularies of humanities studies, namely, contact zone, third space, and border crossing. Homi K. Bhaba's notions of 'in between-ness' and hybridity also fit here (Bhaba 1994:153-72). Mary Louise Pratt defines 'contact zone' as 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish on-going relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality and intractable conflict' (Pratt 1992:6). Here

the 'colony' is seen as a hybrid configuration or zone of contact or a 'third space'. Work in the sub-discipline of postcolonial translation seeks to challenge an older notion that an original is superior to a translation. The metaphor of a colony seen as a translation, a copy of an original located elsewhere on a map, invokes notions of power, violence, oppression, and yearning for freedom, legitimacy, reciprocity, and mutuality. The history of texts being translated into European languages is seen to perpetuate this colonizing process. One premise supporting advances in postcolonial translation is the notion that translation always involves more than language. Translation is always imbedded in cultural, social, and political systems and located in history (Bassnett and Trivedi 1999:2-6; Baker 2009:7-8).

The postmodern concern for 'the other' resonates with the radical emphasis on the primacy of context in studies of inculturation hermeneutics by Justin Upkong and in the postcolonial emphases of R.S. Sugirtharajah. For the subject of translation, these developments privilege the context in ways that often minimise concerns about fidelity to the source. Susan Bassnet and Harashi Trivedi argue that the notion that the original writing or source is superior to the translation of the original was invented at a time when colonial expansion was beginning (1999:2-3, 17). Quoting the poet, Octavio Paz, they claim that no text can be entirely original because language itself essentially is already a translation from the nonverbal world, and each sign and each phrase is a translation of another sign or another phrase (Bassnet and Trivedi 1999:154). They contend that history shows that translation has been at the heart of the colonial encounter, and that the time has come to rethink the history of translation and to revise its practices in terms of appreciating the former colony as the other. I agree that historical distance from the colonial era has changed things for linguists and missionaries. Naive translation that privileges the source and discounts the reader, no longer serves a responsible effort to transfer meaning. I also believe that contemporary postcolonial

writers, thinkers and translators tend to push the pendulum too far in emphasising the context and reader.

The related themes of paradigms, incommensurability, and untranslatability raise questions about identifying common traits in traditions. For languages to be commensurable, they must share understanding between them. Thomas Kuhn's well-known 1962 work, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, introduces paradigm theory for both scientists and general readers.¹² If a language is construed as a system of signs, each language system defines concepts within a range of ideas and experiences, and these systems of signs may prove difficult to translate. Scientific paradigms operate in similar fashion. Philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre has explored how members of rival traditions understand and communicate with differing or competing traditions and establishes two possible outcomes: differences may rise to the level of untranslatability, or concerted efforts at dialogue may prove to foster translatability. Linguistic untranslatability challenges translators when it is the case that one language lacks the same resources of concept and idiom as another or in the case of poetry, where form expresses sense. MacIntyre emphasises that languages embody sets of beliefs and that an understanding of the tradition of beliefs in a culture as part of a linguistic tradition is essential. Such culture learning requires immersion by a would-be learner in the culture (a la Polanyi's notion of indwelling) in order to learn the new language as a second first language (MacIntyre 1981:370-388).

Ricoeur argues that translation is theoretically impossible, but because translation occurs again and again, it must be practically achievable. Ricoeur refers to the considerable fact of the universality of language and avers that all languages use signs.

¹² Polanyi biographer, Martin Moleski, has noted similarities between Polanyi's descriptions of changing interpretative frameworks and Kuhn's description of paradigm change (Moleski, 2007:8-24). Kuhn and Polanyi discussed their similar ideas at conferences in Palo Alto (1958) and in Oxford (1961). Kuhn acknowledges Polanyi's influence in the second edition of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1970:44, 191). The Kuhn-Polanyi correspondence and the questions of 'priority and credit' are explored in five separate articles in *Tradition and Discovery* 33/2, 2006-2007 (The Polanyi Society Periodical).

He emphasises the historical fact of translation and recognises many examples, including ancient practitioners such as travellers, merchants, ambassadors, and spies. Humans can learn multiple languages, and many persons have become bilingual or even polyglot. If translation is possible, it is because, beneath the diversity of languages, hidden structures that bear the traces of a lost original language exist and need to be rediscovered. They consist of a priori codes, universal or transcendental structures, that need to be reconstructed (Ricoeur 2007:107-108). Ricoeur sees the processes of bringing the reader to the author or the author to the reader as practices that offer linguistic hospitality (Baker 2009:216-26).

3.5 Bible Translation

No other book or set of documents has been translated over such a long time period or into so many languages as the Christian Bible. The expansion of Christianity from its Jewish roots and Jerusalem epicentre into the ancient Greco-Roman world and beyond is linked to the success of Bible translation. The work of Bible translators continues as teams of expatriate missionaries and indigenous speakers combine to translate the Christian scriptures into indigenous tongues.¹³ As of 2005 the Bible, or portions of the Christian scriptures, had been translated into more than 2400 languages (Noss 2007:24).

The original biblical languages numbered three. Hebrew is the original language of what Christians refer to as the Old Testament (OT) and what is also called the Hebrew Bible. The few exceptions in the corpus are several chapters in Daniel and Ezra that were written in Aramaic. The New Testament (NT) was written in a form of Greek sometimes referred to as *koine* (common). Literally *koine* refers to common dialect

¹³ Lamin Sanneh (*Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, 1989/2009), William Smalley (*Translation as Mission*, 1991), and Peter Phan (*In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation*, 2003) report on the social and cultural impacts Bible translation has had on Christian mission.

Greek that flourished in the postclassical or Hellenistic era and was used to translate the Hebrew Bible into the Septuagint. Some scholars believe the Semitic cast of the Septuagint exercised a Jewish flavour upon the Greek New Testament. If the New Testament authors were Greek-speaking Jews this too would account for a Semitic character to be manifest in the New Testament books. Furthermore, the many 'Semitisms' found in the sayings and teachings of Jesus likely represent the historical reality that Jesus spoke Aramaic (Ackroyd and Evans 1970:7-11).

The *Septuagint* (known also by the letters LXX that refers to the 70 translators who completed the project) was produced in 250 BCE for the Jewish community residing in North Africa and represented a great achievement in the intellectual centre of Alexandria. Most of the New Testament quotations of the Old Testament are taken from the *Septuagint* (Noss 2007:37-40).

Subsequent translations in the early centuries of Christianity feature Greek and Latin in the West. Jerome undertook to standardise the Latin translation of both testaments in the early years of the fifth century. His translation is known as the *Vulgate*. Christianity also began to spread eastward in the second century, and a Syriac translation of the scriptures known as the *Peshitta* dates from the fifth century (Burkitt 2004:40). Other notable translations from early eastern Christianity include the Ethiopic and the Coptic.

Lamin Sanneh summarises the ability of the Christian church to adopt translation as a means of expansion and assimilation,

Christianity is remarkable for the relative ease with which it enters living cultures. In becoming translatable it renders itself compatible with all cultures. It may be welcomed or resisted in its western garb, but it is not itself uncongenial in other garb. Christianity broke free from its absolutized Jewish frame and, through a radical pluralism, adopted the Hellenic culture to the point of near absolutization. By looking at the expansion of mission beyond Rome and Byzantium, we can see how this risk of absolutization was confronted. (1989:50)

Andrew Walls refers to the translation principle as animating Christian history. He claims that this vernacular principle 'received its most vigorous assertion in the sixteenth century'. He refers to Protestantism as essentially northern vernacular

Christianity. It is ‘Christianity translated, not only into local languages but into the local cultural settings of Northern Europe’ (Walls 1996:40).

Translating the Bible presents the would-be translator with the same set of questions and challenges that face all translators in every age. Jerome, Luther, Schleiermacher, and Nida have all been signal contributors to the historical development of translation theory. The many translation theories addressing free versus literal approaches and form versus content debates affect Bible translation like any realm of textual translation. The work of Bible translation also raises theological issues because the biblical text is regarded by the faithful as sacred and therefore an authoritative text (canon) that tells a narrative of God’s people, sets forth principles of faith and conduct, and claims to be the supreme revealing word from God. Islam claims such esteem for its sacred text, the Qur’an, and most Muslim scholars maintain that the Arabic text of the Qur’an cannot be translated; it only can be interpreted (Abdul-Raof 2001:6). Christian interpreters have promoted translation from the earliest days of Christian expansion but do so with expressions of caution and respect for a text believed to be inspired by God and authoritative for the church. Many centuries of translation, scholarship, worship, and devotion have enabled the Christian Bible to gain a cultural weight and ‘that accumulated weight, if nothing else, affects the way any translator approached the text.’ (Pym 2007:196) Anthony Pym explains that a sacred text is not sacred as a linguistic object but is regarded as sacred by adherents of the religious faith—thus, he concludes that ‘sacredness is a fact of historical reception’ (2007:196).

Modern translation theories for Bible translators utilise, according to Anthony Pym, either representational epistemologies or non-representational epistemologies (Pym 2007:191). Non-representational epistemologies are those that start from the division between spirit and form where the translator can grasp the spirit through some kind of revelation or enlightenment (Pym 2007:201). Included in this category are inspiration,

divine dictation, and any transfer of a textual message by a divine mediator. The focus of non-representational epistemologies is on the translator more than upon a text. Mohammed's account of receiving the revelation that came to be written as the Qur'an is a famous case in point.

Cameron Townsend founded Wycliffe Bible Translators in 1934 and named it after the pioneer translator of the English Bible, John Wycliffe.¹⁴ Eugene Nida graduated from UCLA in 1934 and along with Kenneth Pike joined the fledgling organization. Both Pike and Nida studied linguistics at the University of Michigan and followed the scholarship of Leonard Bloomfield, Charles Fries, and Edward Sapir. Nida began working with Bible translators who were actively translating to populations in the field and discovered how important it was for translators to study anthropology and learn the cultural settings of receptor languages. He helped translators face questions about finding suitable words for unfamiliar ideas for an audience. For example, how does the translator handle the term 'camel' in a culture that does not know such animals and how does one translate the religious significance of 'baptism' or 'circumcision' in a society that handles such rites of passage as the societal transition to adulthood (Stine 2004:27-36).

In several landmark publications Nida articulates a theory of translation and an ethno-linguistic theory of communication. His work asserts that all communication takes place in a cultural context. In a simple act of translation by a bilingual translator, the receptor (translator) of the original message becomes the source of the message offered in a target language. Nida follows a version of the code model of communication, focusing on a sender, message, and receiver. I find this simple 'three-language' communication model fruitful for drawing a map of missional translation.

¹⁴ Townsend also started a 'summer linguistics' training programme that has grown into a sister organization to Wycliffe Bible Translators (WBT). SIL, an NGO, builds capacity for sustainable language development and trains translators through research, translation, training and materials development. WBT is a mission agency that that initiates and supports projects to translate the Christian scriptures.

Nida wisely articulates that translators must pay attention not only to the source and receptor but also to the cultural assumptions of the translator (Nida 1964:120-44; Nida and Reyborn 1981:1-4, 48-58).

In his 1964 work, *Toward a Science of Translation (TASOT)*, Nida introduces the translation approach of functional equivalence that is better known as ‘dynamic equivalence’. Nida argues that this approach contrasts with what he calls formal equivalence. Formal equivalence focuses on ‘the message itself, in both form and content’. In such an approach a translator pays attention to ‘such correspondences as poetry to poetry, sentence to sentence, and concept to concept’. Nida offers dynamic equivalence as an alternative approach where translators would seek to create a dynamic relationship between receptor and message based on ‘the principle of equivalent effect’ (Nida 1964:159). Definitions and descriptions offered by Nida in two of his important publications follow:

Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose. (Nida and Taber 1969:24)

The translation process has been defined on the basis that the receptors of a translation should comprehend the translated text to such an extent that they can understand how the original receptors must have understood the original text. (de Waard and Nida 1986:36)

Nida’s theories posit that all languages have approximately the same value and that anything communicated in one language can be transferred to another. He believes that Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic, are neither elevated nor sacred but subject to the same characteristics and limitations of other languages. Eugene Nida’s scholarship, therefore assumes that all human experience and human cultures share a commonality that makes communication across languages possible. Nida’s ideas about dynamic equivalence influenced him to emphasise the context in the translator’s work. The translator’s real work is to understand the cultural and linguistic features of a society so the receptors

can experience the dynamics of the biblical message in ways similar to other receptors. The needs of the receptor take precedence over actual forms of utterances or literal meanings of terms. Thus, Nida's views on translation stand in contrast to Schleiermacher's preference for a translation to sound foreign. Nida seeks to leave the receptor/reader in peace and to move the source text toward the receptor/reader. Because dynamic equivalent translations seek to be read as naturally as possible in a target or receptor language, the translator's goals are fluency and understanding (Stine 2004:161-163).

Although Nida's influence has been dominant in Bible translation circles, he is not without his critics. Those who favour a more formal approach in equivalence articulate concerns about translators faithfully reproducing literary forms such as Hebrew poetry. The 2001 translation project that produced the English Standard Version (*ESV*) Bible treats more rigorously the biblical genres and literary styles found in its source documents. The *ESV* eschews 'dynamic equivalence' and offers an 'essentially literal' translation (Grudem et al 2005:58ff). A. Nichols, a biblical scholar, also questions the adequacy of Nida's theory of language that undergirds his translation theory. In particular Nichols disagrees with Nida giving priority to the contextual over verbal concordance (Nichols 1986:45-7; Prickett 1986:21, 32-5). Epistemological scepticisms in postmodern thought likely would find fault with Nida's assumptions about human universals in language and culture. Alternate epistemologies doubt the notion of equivalence and emphasise instead the difficulty and indeterminacy of translation. Pym observes, 'the analytical scepticism of a Quine, the self-righteous poetics of a Meschonnic, or the gnawing grammatology of a Derrida are never allowed to question the message to be conveyed' (Pym in Noss 2007:213).

R. S. Sugirtharajah has written numerous works exploring what he calls 'postcolonial reconfigurations' in Bible reading, Bible translation and doing theology. He claims that

theology in the Third World (Global South) continues to reflect two discourses: ‘theology as an experiential enterprise’ and ‘identity-hermeneutics’ (Sugirtharajah 2003:3). Postcolonial critiques of translation represent responses to literature and literary translation associated with colonialism.¹⁵ Postcolonial views on translation register suspicion of translated texts by colonial translators, ‘refuse to take the dominant reading as an uncomplicated representation of the past’ and introduce ‘alternative readings’ (Sugirtharajah 2005:3). Sugirtharajah complains that Bible translators have a far greater reverence for Hebrew, Greek and Latin than for the spirit of the target languages. He believes receptor languages should ‘be allowed to interrogate and even radically disrupt biblical languages.’ He follows T. Asad and boldly claims, ‘the role of translation is to subvert meaning, grammatical arrangements, and linguistic practices.’ Asad argues for translation to quest for subversion as well as critique where subversion is ‘a matter of overturning, undermining and destroying’ (Sugirtharajah 2002:171-8). Such a critique goes too far if it rejects a translator or translation simply because the translator is from a colonial power. On the other hand, the postcolonial critique is a helpful and important reminder that all writing, including translation, does reflect a perspective, a cultural location in time and space.

A different but significant source of criticism comes from new developments in translation studies and new efforts at devising translation theory. Particularly interesting is a movement within the Bible translation worlds of the United Bible Society (UBS) and Wycliffe/SIL that uses relevance theory. Deidre Wilson and Dan Sperber are credited with developing the insights of philosopher H.P. Grice into a communication theory described by the term ‘relevance.’

¹⁵ As far back as 1966, Stephen Neill defines ‘colonialism’ as a term replacing ‘imperialism’ and ‘used almost exclusively as a term of reproach, implying that the only aim of colonial rule has been the exploitation and impoverishment of weaker and defenceless peoples, and that its only results have been the destruction of what was good in ancient civilisations...’ (Neill 1966:11). Sugirtharajah refers to postcolonialism in its earlier incarnation as ‘creative literature and as a resistance discourse emerging in the former colonies of the Western empires’ (Sugirtharajah 2002:11).

3.6 Relevance Theory (RT)

Several Bible translation scholars have contributed volumes to this growing body of relevance theory literature.¹⁶ It may be described as part linguistics and part cognitive science and linked to philosophy of language, particularly pragmatics and semiotics. Sperber and Wilson describe their work in *Relevance: Communication and Cognition* as a study of human communication. Relevance theory is a cognitive theory of communication in that it sees utterance interpretation as being psychologically real. The approach argues that communication seeks to claim an individual's attention. Hence, to communicate is to imply that the information communicated is relevant, or according to the authors: 'Every act of ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance' (Sperber and Wilson 1995:158).

Relevance is determined not only by what the receiving individual registers as a positive cognitive effect but also by the factor of how much effort is required to receive the information. This effort is assessed in an intuitive, comparative way rather than absolutely or mathematically. Most of the emphasis in relevance theory has been placed on the side of processing. This view asserts that human cognition tends to maximise relevance. Positive cognitive effects and low processing cost combine to indicate relevance and to lead to successful communication (Sequeiros 2005:14-15).

Relevance theory may be seen as an attempt to work out in detail one of philosopher Paul Grice's central claims: that an essential feature of most human communication, both verbal and non-verbal, is the expression and recognition of intentions (Sperber and Wilson 1986/1995:21-28). In developing this claim, Grice lays the foundations for an

¹⁶ Cf. Gutt, Ernst-August, (2000) *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context*, (1992) *Relevance Theory: A Guide to Successful Communication in Translation*; Hill, Harriet, (2006) *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication*; and Unger, Christoph, (2006) *Genre, Relevance and Global Coherence: The Pragmatics of Discourse*.

inferential model of communication, an alternative to the classical code model. According to the code model, a communicator encodes the intended message into a signal, which is decoded by the audience using an identical copy of the code. This is also known as the sender-message-receiver (S-M-R) model (Nida and Reyburn 1981:5-19), and this model reflects how a telegraph or radio encodes and decodes a message.

According to the inferential model, a communicator provides evidence of intention to convey a certain meaning, which is inferred by the audience on the basis of the evidence provided. An utterance is a linguistically coded piece of evidence, so verbal comprehension involves an element of decoding. However, the linguistic meaning recovered by decoding is just one of the inputs to a non-demonstrative inference process that yields an interpretation of the speaker's meaning. Grice's philosophical pragmatics recognises that meaning is also determined by situational factors and thus enlarges the focus from the text to the context in which communication occurs. Speech-act theory recognises the role of the speaker's attitude toward an utterance and claims that attitude or intention carries illocutionary force (Hill 2006: 12).

Sperber and Wilson build on Grice's insights and explain how context is selected and that meaning is inferred from the dynamic of the text interacting with the context. The audience must decode an utterance but also must access contextual information. Communication is the fruitful work of inferring from both code and context the meaning of a given utterance. The audience has to fill out the meaning of the utterance as they fill in the implicatures.

Harriet Hill applies relevance theory to Bible translation with special regard for context and comprehension and claims that the translator must recognise that 'context is limited by the mutual cognitive environment'. The mutual cognitive environment is the realm where communicator and audience share ideas, worldview, and understanding (Hill 2006: 27-31). Ernst August-Gutt, a leading proponent of applying relevance theory

to translation, contends that 'relevance' brings out with new clarity the unique mandate of translation vis-a-vis other modes of interlingual expression. In translation, the translator does not simply express the same ideas that an author has expressed, but presents those ideas as an expression of what the author expressed. Wherein lies the distinction? Gutt maintains that only relevance theory answers this question with a claim to some cognitive reality by setting the 'interpretive use' of language over against its 'descriptive use'. The fundamental characteristic of the interpretive use of language is not just the fact that two utterances interpretively resemble each other, but that one of them is intended to be relevant in virtue of its resemblance with the other utterance (Sperber and Wilson 1995:238). Translation, as a case of interlingual reported speech or quotation, therefore, achieves relevance by informing the target audience of what the original author said or wrote in the source text (Gutt 2000:208-210).

Relevance theory is a new development in translation theory vis-a-vis Bible translation and thus requires more time, more testing, and more critical investigation to determine its staying power. Pym offers a preliminary critique when he questions RT's idealistic belief in the sender's intention. He also wonders why Sperber and Wilson and Gutt seem to assume uncritically that a receiver truly can have access to the sender's intention. Conversely, R. Daniel Shaw believes that RT enables missionaries to recognise better that the scriptures emphasise incarnation more than communication. He argues that the 'feedback loop' is stronger in an inferential model than in Nida's S-M-R code model. Shaw finds in relevance theory an inferential model that may represent a new and significant approach for contemporary mission. He claims, the difference is the focus of the two models, either on the surface forms and meanings (words, grammar, and all the trappings of communication and culture) or on the deeper, cognitive understanding of intended meanings. The code model asks, 'How is an understanding of God translated or transmitted from one set of cultural forms and meanings to another?'

The inferential model asks, ‘How does God’s intent become cognitively relevant to and understood by human beings?’ (Shaw 2010:211).

Whereas Nida seems most concerned with a translator understanding the receptor or target culture, Gutt and company shift attention to the intentions of the biblical authors (Pym in Noss 2007:214-15) and how meaning is inferred from the interaction of the text and the context (Shaw 2010:211). As Harriet Hill avers, ‘Context plays as important a role in communication as the text does’. She goes on to elaborate the need for understanding contextual assumptions on both the part of the source and receptor (Hill 2006:13-36). Because communication involves more than sending a message, RT may assist the translator to help the receptor recover meaning in his or her context.

3.7 Conclusion

3.7.1 Translation and Theology

If George Steiner is right that religious frameworks affect views of language, then it follows that Christians should pursue clues and think consciously about language theologically. Steiner argues that any coherent account of language and communication must be supported by a theology of God’s presence. Steiner asserts that where God’s absence dominates human sensibilities, ‘certain dimensions of thought and creativity are no longer attainable’ (Steiner 1989:3, 229). Steiner finds the divine presence especially operational in the creative world of the arts. Steiner’s theology of the divine presence linked to language and the arts might be grounded in an appreciation of the *imago Dei*. Steiner does not say so explicitly, but his many scriptural references and assertions about God’s presence lead me to this conclusion (Steiner 1989:3, 231). Christian theology posits that language is fundamentally good and is a gift from God. Damon So, a scholar steeped in Barth’s theology represents a Trinitarian understanding of language.

The paradigm for a Christian view of communication is the triune God in communicative action where communication is seen as intentional.

Damon So comments,

However, the intra-trinitarian communion is very much a communicative process. And when the Son of God lived on earth, this communicative process definitively involved human language. The Father communicated to him in human language, e.g. in his baptism and on the mount of Transfiguration. It is the most affective, expressive and direct verbal communication of love: 'You are my Son, whom I love, in whom I am well pleased.' Can one be more direct, expressive and affective than this? There is no veiling of the Father's love; there is no stiff upper lip here.

But these words communicate something not just verbally or superficially: the verbal communication is a means to reach the spirit of the person of Jesus Christ. In that sense, the verbal communication is a means of spiritual communication between the Father and his Son. And this spiritual work is facilitated by the Holy Spirit who communicates between the Father and his Son. (The Spirit is clearly present in Jesus' baptism.) I suggest in my first book that it is the spirit (or thought or mind) of the Father which was being conveyed by the Spirit to the Son. That is, the spirit of the Father is the content of communion/communication, even though the vehicle of communication involves human language. My present suggestion is that the same spirit of the Father (or of Jesus) can be communicated through different human languages by the same Holy Spirit to the spirits of people of different languages. Note the three senses of the word 'spirit' being used here to express my understanding of a spiritual communion/communication between the divine and the human.¹⁷

George Steiner argues, in his landmark work on translation, *After Babel: Aspects of language and translation*, that the 'hermeneutic motion, the act of elicitation and appropriative transfer of meaning, is fourfold'. Therefore, as Steiner argues, first there is trust in the meaningfulness of a text. Next comes aggression to extract meaning and incorporation as the translator experiences transformation in handling new materials. Finally, the fourth movement is the enactment of reciprocity. The work translated is reduced and enhanced simultaneously. There is loss but there is transformation and gain as well (Steiner 1992:312-19).

The motion of transfer and paraphrase, according to Steiner, enlarges the stature of the original. Of course, he rightly claims that translation also runs the risk of reducing the original. The notion of the translator seeking to be faithful to the text in rendering its message into another language presupposes failure to meet the obligation to equal exchange and to fidelity by the translator (Steiner 1992:317-319). Darrel Guder points

¹⁷ Private conversation with Damon So who is the author of *Jesus' Revelation of His Father: A Narrative-Conceptual Study of the Trinity with special reference to Karl Barth* (2006).

out the theological reality that translators are sinful humans, so their efforts to demonstrate translatability is risky business. ‘They (translators) never divorce themselves from the desire to bring this powerful and radical gospel under control. That means in the process of translation, complex forms of reduction also take place’ (Guder 2000:97).

Guder like Steiner recognises that translation, linguistic and conceptual, is both a powerful and a complex enterprise. A new translation can uncover dimensions of a message previously hidden in the source or in other translation efforts. At the same time translation implies reduction because translation of a text or an idea in a way that completely and adequately captures every nuance and every tacit dimension of the original expression is impossible. Thus the work of translation is a never-ending sequence. To cite Andrew Walls: ‘the work of translation is the work of revision’ (Walls 1996:29, Guder 2000:98).

3.7.2 Linguistic Features of Translation Identified

Research in linguistics and textual translation leads me to identify three broad features of translation. These features reflect themes I explore further in my study of the writings of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako. Finally, I show how these features shed light on missional translation as I link each of the features to one of my case studies.

i. Similarity and difference

The theme of ‘similarity and difference’ takes translation into the realm of the philosophical notion of ‘being’. Translation takes account of human ontology as ‘the self-among-others.’ No one truly is simply an individual, that is, human beings are not merely monads.¹⁸ Christian theology asserts that human beings are created in the image

¹⁸ Steiner opines, ‘Hegel and Heidegger posit that *being* must engage other *being* in order to achieve self-definition’ (1975/1992:317; emphasis original).

of the triune God and intended to dwell in covenant communities. Each person lives among others. We are different from others and yet there is a similarity among human persons and cultures that makes communication possible although at times difficult. These related themes, similarity and difference, occupy the poles of language translation. I reiterate that because languages evince similarity, translation is possible. And because languages exhibit a wide range of differences, translation is difficult.

ii. Transformation

Transformation refers to a conversion of persons within the translation process. Translation renders ideas in new languages and thus functions as a process of revision. When revision a la translation occurs, transformation results. The transformation is of two types. The translator or witness is changed as a result of his or her encounter with a receptor. The receptor's language and culture shapes the translator to experience life in new terms and ways. And, the receptor also experiences a transformation or conversion as a result of receiving the new communication. Schleiermacher's distinction between foreignisation and domestication highlights the opportunity for twofold transformation. The journey of either the writer or the reader moving towards the other implies that the travelling agent must move and hence undergo transformation to get close to the other. It also is possible and likely that the translator moves both parties toward one another, causing both to undergo a change of mind and of perspective.

iii. Multiplicity

'Multiplicity' highlights the history of literary translation, a history that yields multiple renditions or versions of texts and narratives. This third feature has to do with the results of multiple translation projects achieved over time. An accumulated multiplicity of translated messages is the on-going and never-ending result. In mission studies we might say that the Christian gospel is polyglossic, that is, it can be and has been

expressed in more than one tongue and in plural cultural forms.¹⁹ The translator must inhabit more than one world and pay attention to three cultures: source, witness, and receptor settings. The translator must think in more than one set of categories. Thus, the translator represents a micro version of multiplicity when engaging in the transferring of messages across cultures.

Translations add to the collected body of expressions or interpretations of the Christian gospel. The tradition of the Christian narrative has been expressed in multiple examples of gospel translation: from Hebrew into Greek; from Greek into Syriac, Coptic, and Latin; from Latin into the languages of Europe; from European tongues into Swahili and Xhosa and Ga and Tagalog and Mandarin and on and on. Thus the church, spanning both centuries and continents, reflects a macro-multiplicity of gospel expressions and ways of picturing or understanding Jesus. Every particular culture's translation of the Christian gospel contributes 'a witness that corrects, expands, and challenges all other forms of witness' in the global church (Guder 2000:90).

3.7.3 Polanyi and Language Matters

Michael Polanyi's epistemology, helpful in overcoming deconstructive postmodern attitudes toward language, also yields insights for applying elements of relevance theory to mission as translation. Polanyi speaks of the process of knowing as attending to clues in order to integrate them in a coherent pattern. This construct is not dissimilar to inferring meaning from decoded messages and contextual clues to achieve relevance in communication. Polanyi devotes a chapter of his landmark work, *Personal Knowledge*, to what he terms 'articulation' (Polanyi 1958:69-131).²⁰ He explores briefly the

¹⁹ The term 'polyglossic' appears in the writings of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981:431).

²⁰ I find Polanyi's discussions of language helpful but dated, comparatively speaking, having been published prior to the huge outpouring of books and articles in the field of translation studies that offer more comprehensive treatments of language uses. For example Polanyi identifies three main kinds of utterances: (1) expressions of feeling, (2) appeals to other persons, and (3) statements of fact. I find that

relationship between thought and articulation and makes the claim that the tacit dimension in thought and knowledge is operative in reading and speaking. He refers to a ‘conception evoked by a text’ as follows: ‘The conception in question is the focus of our attention, in terms of which we attend subsidiarily both to the text and to the objects indicated by the text’ (Polanyi 1958/1962:92). In his essay, ‘Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading’, Polanyi describes language in terms of tacit knowing as an ability that separates human beings and animals.²¹

In this chapter I investigate hunches and assumptions about language, meaning, and translation. In surveying linguistics, linguistic philosophy, hermeneutics, and translation studies, I apply useful insights from these disciplines to begin building a conceptual construct of translation. My primary argument belongs to the arena of missiology, so I turn to the works of ‘translation missiologists’ to study their notion of translation as a way of describing the cross-cultural mission enterprise.

the theories of Austin (1965), Searle (1969), plus the Relevance Theory spokespersons (Sperber & Wilson 1995, Gutt 2000) represent a later and more sophisticated treatment of speech utterances.

²¹ ‘When language is understood as tacit knowing, and the acquisition of language is accordingly explained by the dynamics of tacit knowing, man’s unique linguistic powers appear to be due simply to his higher general intelligence’ (Polanyi 1967:206).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Missiological Concept of Translation: Insights from Historians of Mission

4.1 Introduction

Linguistic translation was not enough; conceptual translation was necessary in order to convey the fact that Jesus had ultimate significance for Greek pagans, just as he had for devout Jews. They presented Jesus as Lord, *Kyrios*. It was a word that Jews could use readily enough of the Messiah; Peter speaks to a Jewish audience of Jesus being made 'both Lord and Messiah'. (Acts 2:36)

So argues Andrew Walls as he probes the cross-cultural transmission of the Christian faith in the first century as it moved from its Jewish roots to a Hellenistic appropriation (2004:5). My aim is to build on Walls' notion of 'conceptual translation' and articulate a category that charts the transmission of Christian message from source to receptor and continues with indigenous appropriation and theologising. Although the notion of translation primarily originates in the world of languages and texts, I apply it to the transfer of concepts, ideas and institutions.

John Parratt mentions that 'contextualisation,' 'indigenisation', and other terms have been derived from European languages and represent western categories. Theological method and terminology, Parratt asserts, will need to develop in places in the non-Western world (2004:8-9). Such theological development I construe to be another kind of 'translation' for the necessary efforts will carry meaning across cultures. I cite several theologians and one anthropologist below to show that conceptual translation has resonance in the academy in addition to the work of Walls, Sanneh and Bediako.

Missiologist Tim Tennent, who studied in Edinburgh under Andrew Walls, describes a missiological notion of translatability: 'I am defining theological translatability as the ability of the kerygmatic essentials of the Christian faith to be discovered and restated within an infinite number of new global contexts.' Tennent notes that in the twenty-first

century, he sees a cultural and geographical shift not to one new centre of Christianity but to multiple 'centres of universality' (Tennent 2007:16).

Theologian J. Andrew Kirk describes the task of theology as a matter of translation and comments that this effort involves careful biblical interpretation.

This delicate and complex task can best be seen as one of translation: discovering how the word of God which was written down and lived out 2000 and more years ago can be recognised as God's word today in such a way that it commends allegiance and obedience. This is part of what is meant by hermeneutics [the discipline of interpreting and applying the message]. (Kirk 1999:16)

Kirk indicates a preference for 'translation' compared to the more widely used terms: enculturation, contextualisation, indigenisation, and adaptation.¹ He cites the procedure of dynamic equivalents as being extended from linguistics to communication theory. This engagement of theology and culture brings the two horizons of ancient text and contemporary context together in a way that seeks an appropriate measure of attention being paid to both (Kirk 2006:88).

Louis J. Luzbetak reflects on various kinds of translation:

Besides Bible translation, the Church needs a considerable amount of translation as a worshipping people of God in its liturgies and rituals. The Church needs translation to carry out its role as religious and moral leader. The local churches need translation to be able to share their experiences and growth with one another and to transmit their religious and moral messages across generations and other sub-cultural boundaries. (1990:109-110)

Luzbetak goes on to add education, socio-economic programs, offering food, and providing medicine as arenas of ministry requiring the work of translation.

In an essay on 'untranslatability' theologian George Lindbeck makes reference to translation in a non-literary and conceptual sense.

A second introductory element is to alert the reader that it is conceptual or categorial translation that we shall be speaking of, not translation from the original Greek or Hebrew of the Bible into other natural languages... and [we] are asking whether the conceptual and categorial idioms associated with non-biblical comprehensive outlooks have similar capacities. (Lindbeck 1997:429)

¹ I distinguish 'inculturation' from 'enculturation' in note 22 on p 44. See Luzbetak (1988:92) who explains that 'enculturation' refers to the process of learning a culture versus 'inculturation' that is a synonym for contextualisation.

Lindbeck distinguishes translating conceptual and categorical idioms over against but alongside linguistic translation. Paul Ricoeur, Michael Polanyi and others express a similar notion regarding the role metaphors play in the transfer of knowledge. Aristotle defined metaphor as ‘transference’ as explained in terms of movement, from-to, and as designated by the Greek term *epiphora*. For my purpose here, metaphor may be regarded preliminarily as representing an idea similar to translation called categorical transfer.² Ricoeur states:

What is being suggested then, is this: should we not say that metaphor destroys an old order to invent a new one; and that this category-mistake is nothing but the complement of a logic of discovery ... Pushing this thought to the limit, one must say that metaphor bears information because it ‘re-describes’ reality’. (Evans 1995:100-02)

Because twenty-first century Christianity represents a global community of Christian churches, a growing conversation emerges requiring new terminology and categories. Parratt is right to expect non-western communities of Christianity to contribute the lion’s share of the new ideas. In a 2005 book of essays, Charles Kraft suggests that the current terms of choice in the academy, ‘inculturation’ and ‘contextualisation’, do not adequately express complex ideas about cross-cultural gospel communication. Kraft implies that the mission studies academy will explore new vocabulary options (Kraft 2005).

4.2 Andrew Walls’ Seminal Contributions

4.2.1 Introduction

² I discuss some of Polanyi’s findings about metaphor in Chapter Five, pp 182ff.

For our purposes it is the work of several mission scholars that offer translation as a category for missiology.³ I begin with the Scottish historian Andrew Walls whom I find to be the primary architect of an understanding of mission as translation.

Walls ranks among the elite few who have made it their business to survey Christianity's growth worldwide. The tradition arguably began with University of Halle professor Gustav Warneck, who established the *Allgemeine Missions Zeitschrift* in 1874 partly to stress the necessity of treating mission history in its social and colonial contexts. The work of Yale professor Kenneth Scott Latourette, author of the monumental, seven-volume *History of the Expansion of Christianity* (New York: Harper, 1937-45), and much else, marked a kind of high watermark for breadth of view and density of detail.

Walls builds on these works but his real distinction lies elsewhere. Methodologically it resides in a succession of penetrating articles detailing the complexities and ironies and unexpected payoffs of cultural exchange. Substantively it lies in his insistence, hammered home in a variety of contexts (including the mentoring of dozens of non-western doctoral students), that Christianity's centre of gravity has decisively passed from the northern to the southern hemispheres. (Sanneh and Wacker 1999:148)

Walls left the British Isles after studying at Oxford and Aberdeen and began teaching church history to seminarians in Sierra Leone (1957) and Nigeria (1962). Living in these African settings while teaching episodes of church history, caused Walls to reflect on mission history in particular. He saw first-hand that traditional church history failed to take proper notice of the great migration in the twentieth century--the shift in Christian growth from churches in the northern hemisphere to the peoples of the southern hemisphere. He realised that significant gaps existed in the theology curriculum regarding Christian history in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

I still remember the force with which one day the realization struck me that I, while happily pontificating on the patchwork quilt of diverse fragments that constitutes second-century Christian literature, was actually living in a second-century church. The life, worship and understanding of a community in its second century of Christian allegiance was going on all around me. Why did I not stop pontificating and observe what was going on? The experience changed this academic for life; instead of trying to extrapolate from that ancient corpus of literature and apply it, I began to understand the second-century material in light of all the religious events going on around me. (Walls 1996:xiii)

³ Although I refer to Walls, Sanneh and Bediako as 'mission scholars' I acknowledge that Walls and Sanneh consider themselves as principally 'historians'. The late Kwame Bediako's identity as a theologian is underscored by the name of the academic institution he founded: *Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology*. Bediako served as General Secretary of the *African Theological Fellowship* and was a member of INFEMIT (International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians). See the 'Introduction' to *Jesus in Africa* (J. J. Visser and Gillian Bediako in Bediako 2000:vii-xiii).

Walls' experience of African Christianity also contrasted sharply with the loss of vitality he perceived among churches in his British homeland. Walls comments on Christianity's gravitational shift: 'Christianity is now entering a new phase of its existence, as a non-western religion, a fact that must inevitably have implications for its expression, its ways of thinking, its theology' (Walls 2009:48).

Walls' work on translation themes largely has been collected in two books of articles.⁴ I find in his essays three key ideas: (1) 'World Christianity' as dynamic and serial in development, (2) the translation principle and gospel appropriation, and (3) conversion as the turning of what is present in a culture toward an allegiance to Christ. These ideas have coalesced as Walls studied the entire enterprise of the Christian gospel transmitted in various ages and settings.

4.2.2 World Christianity as Dynamic and Serial

Walls notes the use of 'World Christianity' as shorthand for the era when the West was eclipsed numerically by Christianity in the global South.⁵ From the historian's perspective, Walls studies how Christian communities have been established throughout the centuries in places spanning the entire globe. He believes that an essential dimension demonstrated by these communities is the variety of transformations that have occurred throughout the gospel's global diffusion. He also notes that Christian communities have diminished and even disappeared over the same span in time. Christianity is a dynamic missionary movement that has 'no abiding home' and no permanently fixed centre. As

⁴ These volumes are: *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (1996) and *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (2002).

⁵ Walls was instrumental in founding the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World (Aberdeen, 1982) and in founding the *Journal of Religion in Africa (JRA)*. He compiled bibliographies of World Christianity for the *JRA* and for the *International Review of Mission (IRM)*. See the essay by Jonathan Bonk titled, 'Changing the Course of Mission and World Christian Studies' (Bonk in Burrows et al 2011:61ff).

Christianity diffuses into new cultural environments, what results represents both continuity with its antecedents and new developments (Walls 1996:22-4).⁶

Walls argues that Christianity's advance or expansion has been serial but not progressive. By comparing Christianity to Islam, Walls notes that both religions have spread across the globe and gained adherents from a diverse collection of peoples. Islam has been markedly successful in retaining allegiance whereas Christianity has had both significant gains and losses. For example, Yemen was once a Christian kingdom; Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Tunisia were once all leading centres of Christian faith. Great Britain was the chief centre for the sending of Christian missionaries in the nineteenth century and most of Europe was a Christian heartland. None of these places demonstrates the strength of Christian adherence that they formerly did. Christians in Britain and Europe now live at the margins whereas Christianity has crossed boundaries so that formerly marginal areas are becoming new heartlands (Walls 2009:48-9).

In a 1995 lecture, Walls cites Latourette's magnum opus in his title: 'A History of the Expansion of Christianity Reconsidered: Assessing Christian Progress and Decline' and concludes, 'The Christian story—and this, too, is fundamental to Latourette's view—is not steady, triumphant progression. It is a story of advance and recession' (Walls 2002a:12). Walls sees Christian history unfolding in six stages with episodes of advance, decline, and relocation evident in each translated version:

1. *Jewish*: This stage ended abruptly with the end of the Jewish state occasioned by the holocausts of AD 70 and AD 135. Continuity with Israel is a hallmark of its legacy.

2. *Hellenistic Roman*: Greek culture offered philosophical categories and the Roman Empire built roads, cherished law, and gave Latin as a liturgical language.

3. *Barbarian*: Rome fell to the Barbarians. Christian monks transmitted the gospel to communal tribes of people that led eventually to the Christian nations of Europe.

4. *Western Europe*: This stage produced a Protestant Christianity emphasising vernacular scriptures; and a Roman Catholic version linked to Latin culture.

⁶ I learned of Andrew Wall's fondness for the word 'diffusion' in an email correspondence with Bill Burrows (18 January 2014). Dr. Burrows, former editor at Orbis Books, served as Andrew Walls' publisher. Walls uses the word 'diffusion' to refer to Christianity spreading or dispersing among peoples scattered across the globe (Walls 2002:30, 67). Sanneh uses 'diffusion' in a different and more technical sense as a missionary method that makes the missionary culture 'the carrier and arbiter of the message.' He contrasts mission by diffusion with mission by translation that rejects deference to the missionary culture and encourages 'indigenous theological inquiry' (Sanneh 2009:33-4).

5. *Expanding Europe and Christian Recession*: This stage saw the great migration of European peoples setting out in both colonial and mission ventures.

6. *Cross-Cultural Translation*: The twenty-first-century church is a church whose mission is from anywhere to anywhere; cross-cultural translation becomes a multifaceted endeavour involving many who travel and bear witness in all directions. (Walls 1996:16-25)

These stages of Christian history represent the crossing of cultural boundaries as one phase gives way to the next.⁷ Each new point or place on the Christian circumference has potential to become a new Christian centre. Walls' reading of Christian history as 'advance and decline' may be challenged or require nuancing at several points. The general sweep of Christian history does give evidence of numerous advances and declines, yet there are exceptional cases as well. First, Rome has endured as a Christian centre. As the headquarters of the Roman Catholic Church, the Vatican in Rome remains a definitive centre of the Roman Catholic version of Christianity. At the same time, Christian numerical strength is waning in the larger context of Italy and in other parts of Roman Catholic Europe.⁸

A second challenge to Walls' understanding of history involves the contrast he draws between Christianity and Islam. It is true that Islamic success is impressive in a global world of many cultures and languages. It has an enduring historic centre (Mecca) and maintains worship and scripture in the sacred language (Arabic) of the founder, Muhammad.⁹ The adherents of Islam claim a steady progress of the faith across a large territory. The identification of faith with culture has produced something called Islamic civilisation that is linked to Muslim history and to the notion of scriptural

⁷ Lamin Sanneh identifies five stages but calls them paradigm shifts: Judaic phase, Gentile/Hellenic phase, the Reformation, nineteenth-century liberalism, missionary movement in non-western world. See Sanneh 1989/2009:6.

⁸ Statistics from the *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Johnson and Ross 2009:160, 168) show that Christian affiliation in Italy in 1910 registered at 99.7% but has fallen to 80.5 % in 2010. The numbers for Spain dip from 100% (1910) to 90.6% (2010) and even Ireland diminishes from 99% (1910) to 95.2% (2010). Exceptions to this pattern of numerical diminution in Europe are Poland which gained from 90.9% in 1910 to 96.3 % in 2010 and Bulgaria whose numbers rose from 81.9% (1910) to 83.9% (2010).

⁹ Sanneh (1989/2009:253) cites the Qur'an regarding Arabic uniqueness (10:38-39; 11:1-2, 16; 16:104-5; 28:49; 39:24, 29; 41:41-42; 43:1-3). Because God (Allah) is understood to be the author and is associated with the Arabic speech, the very sounds of the language are thought to be of heavenly origin. Cf. also Guillaume 1956:74 and Gibb 1963:36-37.

untranslatability.¹⁰ Nonetheless, another counter-example to Walls' paradigm is seen in the fact that Muslims experienced a reversal in medieval Spain when the kingdom of Granada in Iberia fell in 1492 (Hastings 1999:328 and Irvin & Sunquist 2012:78). In addition, there are enclaves of Christian witness that have resisted Muslim advance. Egypt's Coptic Church, for example, continues despite overwhelming numbers of Muslim neighbours in modern Egypt (Johnson and Ross 2009:124).

4.2.3 *The Translation Principle*

Theologically, God himself is a translator, acting centrally in the movement of Jesus Christ the Son taking on human form. The Incarnation is described in John's Gospel as (1:14) 'the word became flesh and lived among us' and serves as the starting point for Walls' notion of translation. He goes on to discuss incarnation as a 'paradigmatic translation' and then to locate incarnation as a hallmark of New Testament mission and theology. He discusses several key examples of translation in Christian history (Walls 1996:30-41). In his essays, Walls describes his concept of translation:

Translation leads the Church to appreciate diversity and to abandon the proselyte model that stresses conformity and uniformity. The translation model, on the other hand, builds cultural diversity into Christianity from the beginning and into perpetuity... Conversion is a turning or a redirecting of what already exists in a culture, a context, or a person in a new direction toward Christ. This turning comes from the inside... Translation results in an expanded process of understanding the Christian faith. Translation, by exploring the faith in new terms and in new cultures, leads to an ever-expanding apprehension of 'the full stature of Christ.' (Walls 1996:3-75)

In my reading of Walls' seminal essay, 'The Translation Principle in Christian History', I discovered 14 theses:¹¹ Two of these offer comments about the Qur'an vis-à-vis 'translation.' Three are declarations that refer to (1) the nature of conversion, (2) the

¹⁰ Understanding the sacred text, according to Sanneh, seems subordinate to venerating it. The Christian scriptures, in contrast, are translatable and reveal Christ to the heart of each culture into which they are translated. Azumah (2011:66) underscores this notion of a nontranslatable Qur'an though he mentions that the Hannafi'i School of Law is the one 'School of Law' that allows for exceptions under special circumstances for permissibly reciting the Qur'an in a non-Arabic language. Although Islam resists translation of the Qur'an as sacred text, many translations exist as 'interpretations'.

¹¹ Walls' essay appears in the volume, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (1996:26-42), and first appeared in Philip Stine 1990:24-39.

observation that most translations are retranslations and (3) the link between translation and revision. The remaining seven theses discuss aspects of Jesus' incarnation linked to the theme of translation.

Here is the first thesis in Walls' own words:

Incarnation is translation. When God in Christ became a man, Divinity was translated into humanity, as though humanity was a receptor language. Here was a clear statement of what would otherwise be veiled in obscurity or uncertainty, the statement 'This is what God is like'. (Walls 1996:27)

He goes on to say that when 'Divinity was translated into humanity he did not become generalised humanity. He became a person in a particular locality and in a particular ethnic group, at a particular place and time' (Walls 1996:27). Since Jesus is the divine 'word' for all humanity he can be translated again and again for various cultures and peoples. The early disciples made a major move in cross-cultural translation when they replaced the Jewish term 'Messiah', the saviour of Israel, with the Greek term *Kyrios*, the term associated with Greek cult divinities, as the title for Jesus Christ. The far-reaching implications of the translation of the name and title of Jesus into Greco-Roman culture occupy a good deal of Walls' attention.¹² 'Christian faith, then, rests on a massive divine act of translation, and proceeds by successive lesser acts of translation into the complexes of experiences and relationships that form our social identities in different parts of the world auditorium' (Walls 1996:47).

Translation is linguistic and cultural, and is always taking place. Language is but the outer shell of a much more fundamental diversity of thought and practice into which the Christian message must be translated. This notion of translation is enriching for the wider church, yet also profoundly challenges existing paradigms of theology.

¹² See Sanneh and Wacker, in which Sanneh builds on this notion in his section highlighting the gospel's translatability (1999:956).

4.2.4 Conversion as the Turning of What Is There to Christ

Another key idea in Walls' scholarship is an understanding of the nature of conversion. Walls frequently uses the terms 'conversion' and 'translation' interchangeably. For a translated idea or concept to be received and understood it must be cast in terms of ideas that a community already possess. This happens as cultural categories are turned to receive the new idea. The new does not replace the old; the old changes to receive and then to reconfigure the new. Walls contrasts 'conversion' with the ancient world's proselyte model whereby a Gentile could enter Israel. Before New Testament times a Gentile could join Israel and be incorporated by embracing a devotion to Torah, taking circumcision as a mark of the covenant, and receiving baptism as a symbol of leaving the unclean world of the pagans. Incorporation is the key word. A proselyte gave up his old identification and became incorporated into Israel's faith and customs. To join Jewish religion as a proselyte was to inhabit a new orientation to Israel's God, law, and nation.¹³

Conversion, alternatively, is construed as a turning or redirecting of the various features of a given culture or context toward the direction of Christ. 'To become a convert, in contrast [to becoming a proselyte], is to turn, and turning involves not a change of substance but a change of direction.' This New Testament view of conversion eventually forced new believers 'to think of the implications of daily life in terms of social identity and Christian identity, disturbing, challenging, and altering the conventions of that life, but doing so from the inside' (Walls 1997:148).

What can we say about the first Gentile followers of Jesus Christ? Are they properly described as proselytes or converts? Did they enter Israel, keep the Torah, and submit to circumcision? The Epistle to the Galatians and the Acts 15 record of the Jerusalem

¹³ For more detailed discussions of converts and proselytes see Scot McKnight's *A Light among the Nations* (1991), A.D. Nock's classic work, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (1933), and Beverly Gaventa's *From Darkness to Light: Aspects of Conversion in the New Testament* (1986). Walls' description of conversion differs in vocabulary and emphasis from these authors but the understandings are complementary.

Council, show that the early church opted for the conversion model. Gentile believers were not required to disavow their social past or adopt Jewish lifestyle habits. The key issues apparently were ‘circumcision as a required practice’ and matters of table fellowship.

In discussing the early church’s transition to the conversion model Walls identifies what he describes as ‘three functions or departures of conversion’.

(1) First, this opting for conversion led the early church to abandon the proselyte model; the new model built in cultural diversity into Christianity from the beginning and in perpetuity.

(2) Secondly, as we have seen, conversion was seen as a redirecting of what already is there in a new direction (toward Christ). Conversion as turning helps one see that gospel-into-culture translation is not simply inserting the gospel into a context; the gospel is dynamic and so are cultural settings so the interactions between the gospel received and its cultural reconfigurations spark a series of complex responses in both directions.

(3) Thirdly, the expanded process of understanding the faith—exploring the faith in new terms within new cultural settings leads to an ever-expanding apprehension of ‘the full stature of Christ.’ (Walls 1996:28-9; 1997:148-9)

This third departure captures the implication of the built-in diversity noted in the first departure. Walls argues that the decision of the apostolic church to receive non-Jewish newcomers as converts set in motion a sequence whereby all subsequent translations of the gospel into new settings invited conversion to run its full course. The subsequent translations would increase the diversity of Christian expression as the gospel became expressed in a plurality of languages, idioms, conceptual categories, living situations, and cultural forms. The apostles guided the early church to envision an eschatological destination of multicultural proportions.¹⁴

Moreover, Walls believes it is possible to identify three stages in the process of conversion during this initial phase of gospel translation from its Jewish roots into a Greco-Roman incarnation. He selects three representative figures as exemplars of the

¹⁴ On the one hand, this diversity is expressed in the vision of Revelation 7:9: ‘After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb’. On the other hand, this multiplication of translated versions of the gospel incarnated within peoples, anticipates a unifying vision captured by Ephesians 4:13: ‘until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.’

three levels of translation illustrated in the Hellenistic world: the apostle Paul, Justin Martyr, and Origen (Walls 2002:148-9).

The first stage of the conversion process is the missionary stage, represented by Paul, who saw the need to recast Christian faith in non-Jewish terms. Paul, who asserted that ‘with Gentiles, I live like a Greek’ (1 Corinthians 9:21), began the work of living on terms set by someone else by undertaking ‘substantial symbol theft’ from the Gentile world. The apostle spoke of Jesus as *kyrios* (lord) instead of messiah and used the Greek idea of *pleroma* (fullness), the picturing of emanations between the transcendent God and the material universe, to describe Christ (Colossians 1:19). Paul artfully referred to Jesus as *kyrios* recalling both the term’s LXX usage for the Hebrew name for God (Yahweh) and its Greek association with pagan deities. His use of *pleroma* challenged its use in the mystery cults of the first century and invested the term with Christological content.

A second stage of conversion is what Walls deems the ‘convert stage.’ Dealing with the Greek past became a much more pressing issue for converts of a later generation such as Justin Martyr. Justin wanted to know how God had been at work among the pagan philosophers before the time of Christ. Justin worked out the theory that the pagan philosophers who had been speaking according to reason, the *logos*, were in fact speaking also in accordance with the *Logos*. He found a way to reject part of his cultural tradition, affirm part of it, and modify part of it. Thus, he came to see the Christian understanding as the true philosophy. His struggle and his achievement is one of maintaining his identity as a Christian within the framework of the Hellenistic intellectual tradition. The Scriptures became a tool for Justin to affirm and critique aspects of his heritage and beliefs. Walls argues that Justin represents the convert stage: he worked to understand the Jewish scriptures in the *Septuagint* version and to apply their truths in light of his Hellenistic background.

The third stage of conversion is labelled ‘refiguration’.¹⁵ This stage requires a second or third generation of Christ followers to assimilate Christian teaching in the receptor culture. A generation that has grown up in the faith would be better situated to embrace and consider aspects of their pre-Christian past. Origen, the North African theologian, found himself working on the task of ‘refiguration’ in the third century. He grew up in a Christian home but he also had a thorough Greek education. Origen was able to reconfigure the whole of the Greek tradition from a Christian perspective. He could do this because he was perfectly at home with the Christian tradition unlike Justin, who was still uneasy within it. Origen and his successors embarked on a system of devising creeds and theological formulations in a characteristically Greek way. Classical Christianity was a ‘refiguring’ of Jewish Christianity that made use of Neo-platonic thought borrowed from the pagan world.

The three stages in summary fashion describe the process of an emerging church tradition arising in a new setting: (1) reconceptualising the gospel in new terms, (2) searching for a new identity (forging a Christian identity for the convert without disavowing or surrendering one’s pre-Christian identity), and (3) ‘refiguring’ one’s old ethos in terms of the new Christian faith and scriptural resources.

4.2.5 Two Principles in Tension

In reflecting upon numerous transmissions of the gospel into various settings Walls has observed two forces or two principles that he claims derive from the gospel itself. One he terms the ‘indigenising principle’. This is a homing instinct that acknowledges every congregation to be imbedded in a particular time and place. Every church is an acculturated church and every theology is a contextual theology. No gospel in history

¹⁵ Walls uses the term ‘refiguration’ where one might expect the word ‘reconfiguration’. I follow his terminology but highlight this unusual word. Theologian Kwame Bediako describes such an account of ‘refiguration’ within the world of Neoplatonic philosophy. He compares theology in the second century to theology in the modern African church (Bediako 1992).

can be separated neatly and cleanly from its cultural setting. Furthermore, no effort at theologising can claim to be supra contextual. The New Testament debate about Gentile believers and Jewish practices showcased Paul's understanding that God would 'pitch his tent' in Corinth and Ephesus as readily as in Jerusalem (Walls 1996:7).

Walls also articulates 'the pilgrim principle'. Although God accepts people where they are and as they are, he does not leave them unchallenged or unchanged. The gospel is good news about deliverance from sin and includes a call away from idols. Devotion to Jesus bids a believer to seek the mind of Christ and to be transformed by the power of God's Spirit. The pilgrim principle, asserts Walls, 'whispers that the Christian has no abiding city and warns him to be faithful to Christ.' Such faithfulness inevitably puts a disciple at odds with aspects of the disciple's culture and society (Walls 1996:8).

While one of Walls' principles can be seen to localise the vision of the church, the other universalises it. The church is both particular and universal. Robert Schreiter writes about this same dynamic, describing the church as both local and catholic. Either of these forces may be manipulated or come to dominate the other. One principle can make the church completely at home in a particular culture to the extent that no other church can live there. Meanwhile, the other principle can lead to a sense of Christian identity as a universalising tendency that fails to hear other voices, especially the prophetic voices of other Christian communions (Walls 1996:53-4). Walls describes how he sees these principles in relationship to each other as:

The homing and the pilgrim principles are in tension. They are not in opposition, nor are they to be held in some kind of balance. We need not fear getting too much of one or the other, only too little. To understand their relationship we have only to recall that both are the direct result of that incarnational and translational process whereby God redeems us through the life, death and resurrection of Christ. (Walls 1996:54)

Thus followers of Christ learn to pay attention to both the universal and particular aspects of following Jesus. There is one gospel. The New Testament highlights this theme: 'There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when

you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all’ (Ephesians 4:4-6). Conversely, many particulars and many genres can be found in the scriptures; so too the world is composed of many cultures and many nations (Genesis 10 and Acts 2). And these are among the many settings for the gospel to enter by way of new translations.

4.2.6 Three Observations on Two Principles

I offer three observations regarding the articulation of the two principles: the indigenising principle and the pilgrim principle:

First, Walls’ articulation of a two-sided tension regarding the gospel related to cultures is echoed elsewhere by numerous missiologists as a proper bilateral concern. The many discussions of catholicity and local theology, syncretism, and translatability signal that this is an on-going point of discussion. For example, Tim Tennent discusses the danger of hyphenated theologies and cites Walls, ‘the Lord of hosts is not a territorial Baal.’ If Jesus is truly Lord, then he is Lord of us all and we are all members of the same body (Tennent 2007:264). Schreiter indicates that inculturation is a risk involving both an emphasis on the dynamic of faith and on the dynamics of culture already in place. ‘The gospel enters a culture and represents *metanoia* (repentance) yet it cannot homogenize the gospel’ (Schreiter 1999:22-3). Bevans asserts,

In the last analysis, the gospel needs to be accommodated, acculturated, indigenized, and contextualized to a culture if it is to make more than minimal impact. Any of these efforts can be excessive and compromise the gospel to the point that it is no longer good news. (1992:10)

A second observation regarding Walls’ two principles is the recognition that references to universality raise the question of criteria. What are the indisputable marks of the gospel universally applicable in all cultural translations of the Christian faith?

How can the universal gospel be described with kerygmatic essentials?¹⁶ Sanneh, in an essay on ‘gospel, translation, and culture’, describes the difficulty of separating gospel and culture even for the sake of definitions.

A central and obvious fact of the gospel is that we cannot separate it from culture, which means we cannot get at the gospel pure and simple. That it is no more possible than getting at the kernel of the onion without the peel. The pure gospel, stripped of all cultural entanglements, would evaporate in a vague abstraction, although if the gospel were without its own intrinsic power it would be nothing more than cultural ideology, congealing into something like ‘good manners, comely living, and a sense that all was well,’ the kind of genial, respectable liberalism that turns the gospel into a cultural flag of convenience. If Christianity could be turned into a pure platonic form then it would be religion fit only for the élite, whereas if it were just cultural reverence it would breed commissars of cultural codes and religious adjuncts as their subordinates, of both of which history has only too many unflattering examples. Yet, in spite of the difficulties, the gospel has its own integrity and speaks to us whatever our cultural or personal situation. The real challenge is to identify this intrinsic power without neglecting the necessary cultural factor.¹⁷ (1995:47)

Nonetheless, mission thinkers seek to identify what is intrinsic and universal. Because the gospel addresses cultures and also critiques them, it must be distinct from cultures as well as embedded within them. Walls finds five universal elements of the Christian gospel that persist over generations. These five commonalities are:

1. Worship of the God of Israel is central.
2. Jesus has ultimate significance.
3. God is active where believers are.
4. Believers constitute a people transcending time and space.
5. Common practices include reading a common scripture and ritually using bread,

wine, and water as sacraments or ordinances (Walls 1996:23-4).

¹⁶ A representative ecumenical document offering a definition of the Christian gospel comes from the WCC Fifth Assembly, Nairobi 1975, titled ‘Confessing Christ Today’: ‘The whole gospel is good news from God, our Creator and Redeemer. On its way from Jerusalem to Galilee and to the ends of the earth, the Spirit discloses ever new aspects and dimensions of God’s decisive revelation in Jesus Christ. The gospel always includes: the announcement of God’s kingdom and love through Jesus Christ, the offer of grace and forgiveness of sins, the invitation to repentance and faith in him, the summons to fellowship in God’s Church, the command to witness to God’s saving words and deeds, the responsibility to participate in the struggle for justice and human dignity, the obligation to denounce all that hinders human wholeness, and a commitment to risk life itself’ (Scherer and Bevans 1999:10).

¹⁷ One might turn this observation upside down and note that it also would be difficult if not impossible to get at the essence of a culture. Even though language may be a culture’s most noteworthy feature, it is part of a complex pattern of habits, customs, values and history. Cultures evince similar features despite great differences in the overall patterns. The Christian gospel can enter a cultural setting and become incarnated there as missionaries offer it ‘in translation’.

Bevans and Schroeder, in their mission theology text, *Constants in Contexts: A Theology of Mission for Today*, include six key constants of Christian faith: Christ, church, eschatology, salvation, anthropology, and culture. Tim Dakin comments on the six constants and notices that they can be subdivided into two sets; first, the theological existence of the church's life includes Christ, eschatology, and salvation, and secondly, what the church looks like in context includes church, anthropology, and culture (Dakin in Walls and Ross 2008:175-84).

Michael Polanyi, a scientist turned philosopher recognises that humans cannot always articulate everything understood in a particular circumstance. One example he uses in explaining his theory is that of the experience of meeting his wife at the train station. In a crowd, he says, he could always pick her face out of a thousand. Never did he fail to recognise her instantly. But he admitted he would be hard pressed to describe her face in such detail that a stranger would be able to spot her. We know the faces and mannerisms of loved ones, yet we know more than we can tell. Perhaps insiders or disciples of Jesus Christ will say that they know the gospel and even understand what elements of belief and practice are essential, yet they too may struggle to articulate fully what these details happen to be or how they fit together. They too know more than they can tell.

My third observation regards Walls' delineation of the two principles as a timely warning about the need to safeguard the balancing 'tension' in the work of gospel translation. This regard for maintaining a healthy tension between the universal and the particular poles must not be minimised in an age understandably fascinated with the many new contexts into which the gospel has been received. Walls has described the pilgrim principle as requiring a matter of 'family resemblance' thus gently calling for universalising criteria in evaluating new translations. He says of the indigenising principle that this homing instinct creates diverse communities where Christ can live

and the Church can indwell. Such a healthy tension between these principles recalls that the linguist as translator strives to be faithful to the source document and to the quest for transmitting meaning into the receptor culture.¹⁸

In reflecting on the nature of Jesus, Walls refers obliquely to his twin principles as exhibiting a ‘bewildering paradox.’

The bewildering paradox at the heart of the Christian confession is not just the obvious one of the divine humanity; it is the twofold affirmation of the utter Jewishness of Jesus and the boundless universality of the Divine Son. The paradox is necessary to the business of making sense of the history of the Christian faith. On the one hand it is a seemingly infinite series of cultural specificities—each in principle as locally specific as that utterly Jewish Jesus. On the other hand, in a historical view, the different specificities belong together. They have a certain coherence and interdependence in the coherence and interdependence of total humanity in the One who made humanity his own. (1996:xvi)

4.2.7 Andrew Walls: *Preliminary Conclusion and Critique*

i. Theology now to be undertaken where the Christian majority lives

The first conclusion reflects on the significance of the demographic shift in Christianity’s centre of gravity (Walls 2002:30-4). Philip Jenkins’ 2002 book, *The Next Christendom*, has served to popularise the idea of shifting centres in Christian populations. The notion of a ‘shifting centre of gravity’ essentially is a demographic indicator of change (advances and declines) in Christian populations. Sebastian Kim comments on the Jenkins book and points out that a problem with the idea of ‘the centre of gravity’ is that the argument relies too heavily on numerical growth of Christian populations (S. Kim 2007:69-72). I agree that any assessment of Christian vitality needs to go beyond demographic analysis.

The rise of a non-western Christian majority in the twenty-first century will shift the locus of theological creativity and make prominent new kinds and nuances of particulars in gospel patterns. Theology emanating from the southern hemisphere is likely to become the representative form of Christian theology. Walls predicts that the European

¹⁸ In the non-western world, Wang Nin explores Chinese translation history and cites Yan Fu who described the need for ‘faithfulness’ (2004:18).

will find in authentic African and Asian theologies, questions that are new and hence puzzling and disturbing (Walls 1996:10). This conclusion flows from Walls' conviction that theology arises as a fruit of vernacular translation in the process of the conversion of the past.

Every time the Gospel crosses a cultural frontier there is a new call for theological creativity. Crossing the frontier from the Greco-Roman to the barbarian world where law turned on compensation for offences, and the responsibility of kin for the offences of their family, opened the way to doctrines of the Atonement. In our own day, the crossing of yet another cultural frontier means a new call for theological creativity as the Biblical tradition interacts with the ancient cultures of Asia and Africa. It could well prove the most important period of theological development since those early centuries and the Christian interaction with the Hellenistic world; e.g. the doctrines of the Trinity and Incarnation were largely constructed from the materials of middle period Platonism, converted for a new purpose.

As Africa and Asia – not to mention Latin America- are increasingly the theatres of Christian mission where Christian choices have to be made, creative theology will become a necessity. And African and Asian materials will have to be used for the theological task, materials that have not been used for that purpose before. They will need to be converted, turned to Christ, as they are used in inter-action with the Bible and Christian tradition.¹⁹ (Walls 2002a:374-7)

The enterprise of theological creativity in the non-Western world posits an appreciation for gospel interactions with indigenous forms of religion. Terence Ranger makes a similar point.

I have been arguing, then, against, any definition of 'indigenous' which excludes the possibility of dynamic interaction with Christianity. I have been arguing also for discussions of 'conversion' to Christianity to take the form of a total religious history of any particular people. (Ranger and Kimambo 1972:266)

ii. The Pauline notion of revelation before Christ

Dynamic interactions between the gospel and pre-Christian religious ideas and practices provoke theological questions. In what instances are these religious traditions appreciated as materials for gospel conversion and when are they to be avoided as dangerous kinds of idolatries? Walls has suggested that Christian expansion has proceeded as missionaries discovered sparks of monotheism and other revelatory vehicles in the cultures they entered bearing the gospel. In Romans 1:18ff the apostle Paul

¹⁹ Walls also contends that church history, like theology, needs to flourish in the non-Western churches and seminaries (2000:105-11). Parratt agrees that theology needs to develop in places in the non-Western world (2004:8-9).

indicated that the Gentiles had God's truth revealed to them and were without excuse when they suppressed the truth by rejecting God's created order. Walls uses 'continuity' and 'discontinuity' as headings that describe the missionary debate over finding 'spiritual goods' in non-Christian religious traditions. He distinguishes between appreciating 'elements of good' and condemning systems. He reminds his readers that Christianity also can be construed as a system and that it is 'not Christianity that saves, but Christ' (Walls 1996:55-67). He implies that in certain times and places the pre-Christian religions themselves prepare the way for the gospel to speak with power and truth. He particularly appreciates the role of African primal religions as affording materials for constructing a distinctly African Christian worldview.

iii. The full stature of Christ

The key insights Walls has gleaned from Christian history lead him to envision an eschatological picture of the church based on the Pauline image of the full stature of Christ. Walls returns to the theme of incarnation as he invokes this image.

Christian faith is embodied faith; Christ takes flesh again among those who respond to him in faith. But there is no generalized humanity; incarnation has always to be culture-specific. The approximations to incarnation among Christians are in specific bits of social reality converted to Christ, turned to face him, and made open to him. (Walls 2008:203)

All of the representations of global Christianity, of redeemed humanity, are partial and incomplete; complete humanity is found only in Christ and the fullness of his body. This idea is modelled in the Letter to the Ephesians as Paul appreciates the Gentile and Jewish Christians living and learning together in Ephesus (Ephesians 4:12-13). Walls refers to the mutuality of this particular bicultural church as 'the Ephesian moment' and wonders if the twenty-first century will not see this unity on a larger scale as a flowering of multicultural expressions of Christianity. This vision is a picture of oneness composed out of diversity.

The Epistle to the Ephesians shows how the two have been made one through Christ's cross. Here are not simply two races, but two lifestyles, two cultures, and, different as they are, they belong to

each other. Each is a building block in a new temple that is in process of building; nay, each is an organ in a functioning body of which Christ is the brain. The Temple will not be completed, the Body will not function, unless both are present. Moreover, Christ is full humanity, and it is only together that we reach his full stature. (Walls 2008:204)

The picture of Christ's 'full stature' being apprehended through the eyes of world Christianities is one of Walls' striking analogies. He has an aptness for big pictures and memorable phrases that endure. A critique, however, is that Walls ranges over history and often discusses 'translation' with a broad brush. Like Bediako, his student and disciple, Walls has not written many detailed case studies that illustrate the mission as translation construct. He does offer many historical examples, including, the Septuagint, Justin and Tatian, Wulfila and Patrick, Boniface, Earl Thorfinn, to name but a few. One could wish for more in-depth analysis yet one is impressed at the great historical range Walls plumbs for examples.

4.3 Lamin Sanneh's Unique Contribution

4.3.1 Introduction

Lamin Sanneh represents another voice espousing translation as a concept that captures the relationship of one gospel interacting with many cultures. Sanneh was born and raised in West Africa, in The Gambia. He left his family religion of Islam and his geographical roots to embrace Christianity and western academia. His doctoral work was in Arabic and Islamic Studies at London University. He has taught students at Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Harvard, and Yale. Sanneh's published works investigate gospel and culture issues in various historical eras. He writes knowingly and personally of both Christianity and Islam. Although I see Andrew Walls as the primary advocate for this construct of translation, I note that Sanneh more frequently uses the phrase, missional translation.

His most recognised publication is *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*. It appeared in 1989 and was reissued in a second and expanded edition in 2009.²⁰ In this landmark work, Sanneh asserts that Christianity translated came to exert a dual force in its historical development.

One was the resolve to relativize its Judaic roots, with the consequence it promoted significant aspects of those roots. The other was to destigmatize Gentile culture and adopt that culture as a natural extension of the life of the new religion.²¹ (1989:1)

The early Church, Jewish in flavour and interpreted by Paul, in its efforts to extend its mission message and praxis, entered new cultures by ‘allowing the religion to arrive without the requirement of deference to the originating culture.’ Sanneh states as an introductory definition, ‘this we might call mission by translation, and it carries with it the need for indigenous theological inquiry, which arises as a necessary stage in the process of reception and adaptation’ (2008:33-4). Sanneh contends that ‘translation creates a pluralist environment of incredible variety and possibility, and invests culture with an ethical, qualitative power. That power may be defined as the capacity to to participate in an intercultural and interpersonal exchange...’ (Sanneh 2009:242).

Sanneh observes that translation is a complex enterprise, and that it ‘forces a distinction between the truth of the message and its accompanying mode of cultural conveyance.’ He goes on to conclude that this distinction between message and medium challenges believers to affirm a primacy to the message over and against its cultural packaging. At the same time Sanneh affirms the honoured place of cultural settings because the missionary translator commits to the bold and radical step that ‘the receiving culture is the decisive destination of God’s salvific promise’ (Sanneh 2009:33-60). This sensitivity to balancing a regard to Scriptural sources and cultural

²⁰ Sanneh’s other major works relevant for this research are: *Encountering the West: Christianity and the Global Cultural Process: The African Dimension* (1993) and *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity* (2008).

²¹ Sanneh uses the term ‘translation’ both linguistically and conceptually. Primarily for him, ‘translation’ is an over-arching construct for gospel transmission into new cultural settings but he often relies on examples of linguistic translation (Bible translation) for evidence to support his claims.

settings is one of the hallmarks of mission as translation. At the same time, I acknowledge that Sanneh's affirming of the primacy of the message conforms to the Bevans critique of a 'translation model' that privileges the content of the gospel.²²

4.3.2 Centrality of *Missio Dei*

Mission as translation, in distinguishing between the message and its cultural carriage, affirms the *missio Dei* as the hidden light of its work (Sanneh 1989:37). Sanneh likewise sees the dynamic of one Christian gospel entering many human cultures as a version of the philosopher's notion of the one and the many (1993:115, 142, 143, 147, 149-150, 171, 246). On the one hand he seeks to hold these two poles together, hence the comment that the gospel cannot be peeled or separated from its cultural clothing. On the other hand, he realizes that cultures must be critiqued by this transcendent gospel.²³ Culture must neither be defined nor deconstructed to absolutes, nor may aspects of a culture serve as material for idols. The person, work, story, and teachings of Jesus will call into question elements of each culture. Thus an incipient distinction can be drawn between God's good news and all cultural settings. Yet core elements of the gospel must be articulated and accomplished nevertheless, from a cultural point of view and in terms of some particular language. Sanneh states that he is concerned not only 'to safeguard the authority of Christ but the authenticity of culture as well' (1993:149).

Another reason for this tension in Sanneh's works involves his two uses of the word translation. When Sanneh is thinking and writing about linguistic translation or Bible translation he more naturally separates the message from any of its carrier languages. On the other hand, when translation is used conceptually to imagine the gospel, and the

²² See Section 4.6 on pp 153ff.

²³ The gospel affirms and critiques cultures because material in the Gospels manifests an 'unavoidable critical stance toward culture by subjecting cultural claims to the scrutiny of the gospel, especially the oppressive elements in culture' (Sanneh 2009:38). This researcher agrees for how can one critique the Nazi Holocaust or occasions of *apartheid* injustice with the gospel message unless one can draw a distinction between the gospel and its cultural incarnations?

Christian faith, expressed in the various symbols and practices of a culture it becomes more difficult to sift out the one 'faith' from the indwelling potential of the many cultural contexts.

4.3.3 The Pentecost Rationale

Sanneh's key historical observation notes how the early Christian church saw its Hebrew origins placed relative to the gospel as the gospel penetrated Gentile communities. The Gentile appropriation of the gospel inevitably removed the stigma of being unclean from non-Jewish cultures and made them available to receive the good news. This process of translation established a degree of cultural decentralisation so that the receiving culture became the new and decisive destination of God's salvific promise (Sanneh 2009:37). Much as Walls located his view of translation in the biblical doctrine of incarnation, Sanneh looks to the Acts 2 account of Pentecost as providing the theological rationale for cross-cultural translation (Sanneh 1993:118, 135-6).

The primitive Christians ... came to a fresh view concerning God's impartial activity in all cultures. The watershed for this new understanding was Pentecost which set a seal on mother tongues as sufficient and necessary channels of access to God, a piece of cultural innovation that enabled the religion to adopt the multiplicity of geographical centres as legitimate destinations for the gospel ... [Thus] no culture is the exclusive norm of truth and that, similarly, no culture is inherently unclean in the eyes of God. (Sanneh 1993:134)

Sanneh posits five consequences of translation (1989:24-49, 201-210). These consequences highlight what happens to and within cultures when the missionary translation dynamic is unleashed.

1. The host or receptor culture endorses the translation; see the example of Pentecost.
2. During translation the culture of the missionary is placed relative to what is translated.
3. The missionary movement and its work of translation signalled an end to Christendom, and religion effectively was separated from its western territorial identity.
4. The missionary translation fosters accountability and guards against cultural idolatry.
5. The missionary translation leads to a renaissance of the host culture.

Therefore, Sanneh argues that missionary involvement in other cultures should be assessed in light of the accomplishments of vernacular translation. He asserts and I

concur that ‘there is a radical pluralism associated with vernacular translation wherein all languages and cultures are in principle equal in expressing the word of God’ (2009:251).

4.3.4 Culture Matters

The early church was confronted by the challenge of maintaining a commitment to a mission culture, insofar as culture embodies faith in a concrete way, while avoiding the sort of cultural idolatry that fuses truth claims and exclusive national ideals. How is cultural commitment compatible with religious openness? The missionary must seek the balancing of cultural specificity with theological standard practices, such that a reconciling of Christ and culture is pursued (Sanneh 2008:4).

Sanneh sees two paradoxes in Christianity vis-a-vis culture. The first paradox is that Christianity is almost alone among world religions ‘in being peripheral in the place of its origin.’ Ever since Pentecost and the rise of the church in Antioch, Christians have turned their backs on Bethlehem and Jerusalem. The Christian crusades, beginning in the eleventh century, offer some episodes to counter this notion as wholesale. The second paradox is that Christians adopted a unique strategy in abandoning the language of Jesus (founder of the religion) and instead adopting *koine* (common) Greek and *vulgar* (common rather than classical) Latin for the languages of scripture and theology. The Syriac Bible (the *Peshitta*) is the closest analogue to a Bible in the Aramaic of Jesus, but it too is a translation from the original biblical languages. The language of revelation for the stories and message of Jesus was Greek, although scholars believe Jesus’s first language was Aramaic. Sanneh cites as a third but secondary level paradox the universal phenomenon of Christians adopting names for themselves without the warrant of scripture. This might be said to contrast with the universal identifying name of Muslim for the adherents of Islam. Christians, on the other hand, call themselves by a

variety of labels: Roman Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Orthodox, Independent, and many others (Sanneh 1993:117-120). Sanneh's point may be nuanced by recognising the remarkable unity and durability of the Roman Catholic tradition. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that Muslims have divisions and party labels too.²⁴

In a 1995 article, 'The Gospel, Language and Culture: The Theological Method in Cultural Analysis', he seeks to make the case for the fundamental character of Christianity being a force for cultural integration.

Christianity affects cultures by moving them to a position short of the absolute, and it does this by placing God at the centre. The point of departure for the church in mission, as we saw at the outset, is Pentecost, with Christianity triumphing by relinquishing Jerusalem or any fixed universal centre, be it geographical, linguistic or cultural, and with the result of there being a proliferation of centres, languages and cultures within the church. Christian ecumenism is a pluralism of the periphery with only God at the centre. Consequently all cultural expressions remain at the periphery of truth, all equal in terms of access, but all equally inadequate in terms of what is ultimate and final. Thus while we cannot conceive of the gospel without its requisite cultural expression, we cannot at the same time confine it exclusively to that, for that would involve the unwarranted step of making ends and means synonymous. Such was the double caution missionary translation introduced into the cultural project, though we are in only the early stages of comprehending its full theological significance. (Sanneh 1995:61)

Schreier rightly has criticised Sanneh's view of culture for being positivist and for relying too much on Matthew Arnold. Sanneh quotes many cultural commentators so it is difficult to gain a clear picture of his own theory of culture. When Sanneh turns to discuss 'vernacular languages and cultures under the Gospel' his argument becomes more compelling and more useful for considering mission as translation.

4.3.5 Translation and the Scriptures

The importance of linguistic translation is the key concept for Sanneh's elucidation of the translatability factor. From Pentecost onwards, Christian history may be viewed as a series of translations as the gospel moved from culture to culture over the centuries. This is a thesis that echoes the research of Andrew Walls. Sanneh would agree, undoubtedly, but in his scholarly work he has sought to show the 'deeper connections

²⁴ Muslims have multiple traditions of interpretation and various Muslim pluralities identify themselves as Shi'ites, Sunnis or Sufis or with other minority categories.

between Bible translating and issues such as cultural self-understanding, vernacular pride, social awakening, religious renewal, cross-cultural dialogue, transmission and reciprocity.’ He highlights ‘reciprocity in mission’ with special emphasis on translation projects in modern sub-Saharan Africa and contrasting features in Islam (Sanneh 2009:214).

For Sanneh, Christianity was a translated religion from the start. In a 1990 essay Sanneh details particular aspects of vernacular translation.

- 1) Vernacular translations of the gospel began with the adoption of indigenous terms, concepts, customs and idioms for the central categories of Christianity.
- 2) Vernacular criteria began to determine what is or what is not a successful translation—with indigenous experts moving to challenge Western interpretations of Christianity.
- 3) Employing the vernacular led to many new languages into which the scriptures were translated
- 4) In numerous cases the missionary translations were the first attempt effort to write down the language—translators had to produce lexicons, grammars, lists of idioms, proverbs, etc.

This massive effort to document the vernacular triggered many consequences arousing loyalties to the indigenous cause—serving as a seedbed of nationalism. Theologically, one might say God’s prevenient grace preceded the missionary and prepared the way to adopt existing forms—as if God was their hidden life. (Sanneh 1990:1-23)

Because all languages are missionally interchangeable, they are instrumental such that in their difference, they serve the same purpose.²⁵

Languages were seen as the many refractions in which believers testified to the one God, so that particular cultural descriptions of God might convey in concrete terms the truth of God without in any way excluding other cultural descriptions. (Sanneh 1995:56)

The operative view of language in Christian translation assumed a close relationship between language and the God spoken of, so that in any cultural representation God can be detached in the mind from the things said to be God, even if these peculiar forms, be they peace-pipe, the bread and wine, the wisdom fire, the *orita*, or what have you, cannot in those specific situations be so easily detached from the idea of God as such. This gave culture and language a penultimate character, allowing them to be viewed in their *instrumental* particularity. (Sanneh 1995:58)

²⁵ A postmodern critique would question Sanneh’s assumption that the same kind of similarity is found among whole cultural systems as exists among languages. Talal Asad’s reading of cultures, for example, highlights diversity rather than unity or similarity; see Asad (1993, chapter one). I affirm Sanneh’s appreciation of cultural similarity that is elucidated by Amartya Sen who champions a notion of global solidarity. Sen also points out Pierre Bourdieu’s insight that ‘the social world constitutes differences by the mere fact of designing them’ (Sen 2006:27, 120-48).

This is another variation on Sanneh's grounding of translation in the *missio Dei*. Sanneh contends it is an important matter not to confuse 'differentiating' and 'unifying', by treating the first, in terms of cultural autonomy, as the source of the second in terms of theological ideas and principles, which is to say, to boil down cultural signs and symbols into a warm, genial construction of the idea of God. It is this difficulty, Sanneh suggests, that Christian realism can help resolve. Consequently Christian commitment to God has necessarily involved commitment also to cultural forms in their historical instrumental potential (Sanneh 1995:59).

One such universal is that every Christian receives an adoptive past and is linked to all those who came before in the faith including Israel. Paul's analogy of the olive tree and the grafted branches offers a picture of this set of relationships. The history of Israel and the patriarchal father Abraham belong to all the faithful. Among the many kinds of particulars are the ways followers of Jesus practice the discipline of praying. All manner of postures and styles and content and emphases adorn the prayers of the faithful in various eras and places.

Consequently Christianity is both a captive to and a liberator of cultures. Thus the translation of the gospel into a culture never occurs without both an endorsement of culture and a critique of culture. Sanneh provides an apt commentary on this understanding of culture that represents these two principles seen in tension.²⁶

4.3.6 World Christianity as a Global Phenomenon

Sanneh also has directed his authorial gaze at what he describes as 'world Christianity'. He hails the demographic transformation of Christian adherence as the end of

²⁶ See Schreiter on *metanoia* in Greinacher and Mette (1988).

Christendom and sees it as one of the consequences of translation.²⁷ Sanneh waxes poetic in the following description of world Christianity:

The exploding numbers, the scope of the phenomenon, the cross-cultural patterns of encounter, the variety and diversity of cultures affected, the structural and antistructural nature of the changes involved, the shifting *colour locale* that manifests itself in unorthodox variations on the canon, the wide spectrum of theological views and ecclesiastical traditions represented, the ideas of authority and styles of leadership that have been developed, the process of acute indigenization that fosters liturgical renewal, the duplication of forms in a rapidly changing world of experimentation and adaptation, and the production of new religious art, music, hymns, songs and prayers. (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005:4)

To what extent do the constantly evolving new contexts affect, inform, shape, and change the notion of translation and even the many facets of the gospel message? Several preliminary conclusions emerge from Sanneh's assessment of the emergence of Christianity as a world religion instead of a western religion. First, the colonial empires waned even as Christianity flourished. This conclusion mirrors Sanneh's double concern to assert indigenous agency in receiving the gospel yet acknowledge colonialist entanglements with Christian mission. If a closer connection had prevailed then would not the Christian religion have waned as the empire retreated? Secondly, the denominational pattern of mission was challenged by twentieth-century church growth. The case of the African Independent Churches is perhaps the most notable example of this pattern of church.

Thirdly, world Christianity is not simply a transplanted European model but represents something new.²⁸ The variety of forms and styles, the complex linguistic idioms and aesthetic traditions, and the differences in music and worship patterns show world Christianity to be hostage to no one cultural expression and restricted to no one geographical centre. This is a familiar theme repeated under a new rubric. More

²⁷ Sanneh's more recent publications reveal the shift in subject by their titles: *Disciples of All Nations: Pillars of World Christianity*, *The Changing Face of Christianity: Africa, the West, and the World*, and *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel beyond the West*.

²⁸ Sanneh sparked an intramural debate with other mission thinkers with the publication of *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (2003). He contends that the term 'global Christianity' represents an older Christendom model whereas 'world Christianity' is the preferable 'new name' for the twentieth and twenty-first centuries' phenomenon of Christian faith translated into many non-Western cultures.

languages and idioms are used in reading the Christian scriptures and in Christian liturgy, devotion, worship, and prayer than in any other religion. The unity of Christianity, however defined, has not been practiced at the expense of the diversity and variety of cultural idioms and of models of faith and practice in use at any one time and in any one church tradition (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005:5). The shift today in demographics and the proliferation of indigenous flavours of Christianity recalls the Roman and Greek origins of the early church but, according to Sanneh, seems less stable and predictable. One conclusion is that the complex world of Christianity as a global phenomenon defies any simple explanation or single cultural formulation (Sanneh and Carpenter 2005:15).

4.3.7 A Contra-Sanneh Critique

Jean and John Comaroff assert that a post-Enlightenment colonisation accompanied nineteenth-century Christian mission in which ‘Europe set out to subdue the forces of savagery, otherness and unreason’ (1991:11). They suggest that Christian mission, and missionary translation, was ineffective when the Tswana identified the power of the whites, not with the word, but with ‘their goods, their technology, and their knowledge’ (1997:77). In a footnote Sanneh describes this work as

a sophisticated presentation of the classical theory of Christianity as a tool of colonial subjugation, and of Africans as victims. As such the book represents the European metropolitan viewpoint, the viewpoint of the transmitters over against the recipients of the message. (1993:91)

A less polemical assessment sees this critique as a serious effort at challenging the salutary effects of vernacular translation in African settings. Were colonial effects more sinister than Sanneh allows? The Comaroffs argue that the colonial evangelists and Tswana people had a dialectical relationship where each set of persons, insiders and the outsiders, influenced one another.

But we did not imply: that the colonial mission project succeeded ... that the missionaries determined how the project worked out ... or that it robbed Africans of their agency. We insist on a dialectical history, a history of reciprocal determinations. Yet we do argue that the presence of the colonial mission had considerable consequences for everyday Southern Tswana life. (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:37)

The Comaroffs label Sanneh's notion of translation, vis-a-vis Africa, as a kind of neo-revisionism that reduces the story of African Christianity to one of 'native appropriation alone' (1997:49). This declaration overstates their case for at many junctures Sanneh recognises the negative effects of colonial influence. The Comaroffs dialogue more with African historians, John Peel and Terence Ranger, than with mission historians like Sanneh. The criticisms of Peel and Ranger take the Comaroffs to task for not taking sufficient notice of Tswana religiosity and the importance of indigenous narrative (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:42; Peel 1992:328-9; Ranger 1992).

All of these parties agree that Christian mission in nineteenth-century sub-Saharan Africa sparked an independent response and that influence between missionary outsiders and local insiders was mutual. The perspectives of historians and ethnographers have different points of departure regarding mission tactics, colonialism, and indigenous appropriation.²⁹ It is difficult to answer the questions of agency decisively without recourse to admitting and asserting assumptions. Did Africans seize the faiths and make them their own, or were Africans victimized by Christianity as missionaries walked alongside colonial powers? African parishioners and African theologians are in the best place to answer such questions.³⁰

²⁹ See T. Ranger (1992), J. Peel (1992), P. Landau (1995), and Howell (2002) for critical assessments of the Comaroffs.

³⁰ John Pobee (1993) chides Sanneh for failing to cite more African voices in Sanneh's 1993 book, subtitled, 'The African Dimension.' T. R. Gorringer dismisses the Comaroff's labelling of Sanneh's translation thesis as a form of 'neo-revisionism' but admits that the process of African appropriation of Christianity is complex (Gorringer 2004:196-9).

4.3.8 Conclusion

Sanneh's understanding of 'mission as translation' led him to search the historical record for instances of vernacular translation. He came to the conclusion that the power of vernacular translation amounted to an argument that represents a significant reworking if not an outright reversal of the post-colonial critique of 19th and 20th century mission as imperialism and colonialism.

Yet, a pivotal difference soon emerged between the logic of the colonial rule and the interest of the emerging African church, and nothing demonstrated that better than the vernacular policy of Bible translation...missionaries empowered mother-tongue speakers by undertaking the systematic documentation of the relevant languages. In many places missionaries aided and abetted the indigenous impulse by encouraging the founding of political organizations, for example, in India and northern Nigeria.

There are grounds for distinguishing between the West's political impact and its religious impact. In their vernacular work, missions nurtured sentiments of national self-preservation; the mother tongue formed and crystallized the anti-colonial impetus. The dramatic effects of vernacular translation overshadowed colonial assumptions and presumptions, and did that as much as by the primacy of local cultural materials in Christian life and practice. Vernacular Bible translation outdistanced and outlasted the forces of ephemeral colonial rule. (Sanneh 2009:162-63)

Sanneh also contends that Western Christianity also represents 'a series of specific vernacular adaptations and cultural adjustments no different in nature from the vernacular appropriation that was underway in non-Western societies' (Sanneh 2012:227). His arguments and evidence have altered the discourse on assessing the modern missionary movement.

4.4 Kwame Bediako's Agreement

Kwame Bediako, a native of Ghana, had a distinguished career as a Presbyterian pastor and African theologian.³¹ Kwame Bediako earned two advanced degrees in French literature at the University of Bordeaux before turning to theology. He and his wife

³¹ Bediako (1945-2008) held doctorates from the Universities of Bordeaux (French Literature) and Aberdeen (theology). He was an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Founder/Director of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana, and Founder Secretary of the Africa Theological Fraternity. He was also Honorary Professor in the School of Theology, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Gillian met Andrew Walls in 1975 when Walls spoke at a conference at the London Bible College. Bediako went on to study under Walls in 1978 at Aberdeen. Bediako's scholarly work is in substantial agreement with the conclusions offered by both Lamin Sanneh and Andrew Walls. Bediako echoes Walls in making broad assertions about translatability.

But behind the Christian doctrine of the substantial equality of the Scriptures in all languages, there lies the even profounder doctrine of the Incarnation, by which the fullest divine communication has reached beyond the forms of human words into the human form itself. 'The word [of God] became flesh and dwelt among us.' Translatability, therefore, may be said, to be in-built into the nature of the Christian religion and capable of subverting any cultural possessiveness of the Faith in the process of its transmission. (Bediako 1995:110)

In his affirmation of translatability, Bediako shows that church indigenisation in the African context³² is a process that can be charted, yet continues to unfold.³³ Bediako agrees with Sanneh that in the journey of the gospel into modern Africa, it is indigenous assimilation rather than historical transmission that has been paramount (1995:119ff). Bediako concludes, 'If it is translatability which produces indigeneity, then a truly indigenous church should also be a translating church, reaching continually to the heart of the culture of its context and incarnating the translating Word.' Sustained by the *missio Dei*, the indigenous and translating church becomes a catalyst for newer assimilations and further manifestations and incarnations of the faith (1995:122).³⁴

Bediako's research on Christian mission can be charted in three periods of development.³⁵ In the first stage, represented by his dissertation on the theme of identity, Bediako argues that early church theologians faced their pre-Christian past

³² References to Africa and 'African context' point to the context of sub-Saharan or 'tropical' Africa unless otherwise noted.

³³ He discusses a 1965 paper by Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria, 'Towards an Indigenous Church'. For Idowu, avers Bediako, 'Christianity was in Africa, but not of Africa ... not yet' (1995:111).

³⁴ E.A. Ayandele, the Nigerian historian, made a telling comment reported by Walbert Buhlmann in *The Coming of the Third Church*. After hearing many western scholars speak critically about the western missionary enterprise, Ayandele remarked at a 1972 conference, 'Even if you came to us within the framework of colonialism, and did not preach the gospel in all its purity, that has not prevented us from receiving the Gospel and genuinely living it' (Buhlmann 1976:171. Bediako concludes, like Walls and Sanneh, that Christianity in Africa is a non-Western religion.

³⁵ This retrospective view of Bediako's career was gleaned from a personal conversation with Andrew Walls on 18 November 2010 in New Haven, CT.

without wholly disavowing it and that modern African theologians are doing the same. Bediako's second season features two books on Christianity in various African settings.³⁶ The third stage features Bediako's growing interest in African primal religions as the soil in which African Christianity took root. In a chapter titled 'The Primal Imagination and the Opportunity for a New Theological Idiom', Bediako hints at the trajectory of anticipated research. This last stage of scholarship was interrupted by Bediako's death in 2008. Many of Bediako's published pieces on this third theme are found in a booklet titled *Jesus in African Culture—A Ghanaian Perspective*, and in articles in the *Journal of African Christian Thought*.³⁷

4.4.1 Identity

Bediako's study of Africa asserts a 'hermeneutic of identity' linking a translatable Christian faith with Africa's primal religious heritage. He draws a sophisticated historical parallel between early Christianity's adoption of Greek and Roman thought and modern African Christians using their own cultural materials in developing theology (Bediako 1992:15-16). Bediako discovers that in each case of gospel transmission Christian identity necessarily was forged from ethnic sensibilities and cultural heritage alongside universal faith elements resulting from Christian conversion. Bediako came to believe that Christian identity³⁸ as a theological concern required grappling with the following key questions: How can Christian beliefs and practices be integrated with a people's cultural values? How can Christian identity be established that does not deny an ethnic community's traditions and customs?

³⁶ *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995) and *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (2000); the latter is a compilation of excerpts from Bediako's other books plus four articles. *Jesus in Africa* was republished in 2004 by Orbis Books and titled *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience*.

³⁷ The *Journal of African Christian Thought*, *JACT*, is published by the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture, founded by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in 1987. *JACT* began publishing in 1998. Bediako served as the first rector of the Institute and the first editor of the journal.

³⁸ Bediako does not furnish a definition of 'identity' but he seems to have in view matters of cultural or societal identity. He invokes Kenneth Cragg's phrase, 'integrity in conversion' and explains it as 'a unity of self in which one's past is genuinely integrated into present commitment' (Bediako 1992:4).

Bediako's research features three second-century theologians from North Africa: Tertullian of Carthage and Justin and Clement from Alexandria; Bediako's study also includes Tatian, a Syriac theologian who lived for a number of years in Rome. Bediako pairs these early Christian thinkers with four twentieth-century African theologians: Bolaji Idowu, John Mbiti, Mulago Gwa Cikala, and Byang Kato. Although modern Africa does not have a philosophy tradition analogous to ancient Greece, comparing Greek patristic insights and modern African theology is still useful³⁹ (Bediako 1992:434-8).

The African primal tradition described by Europeans as demeaning and 'unworthy', has become an important academic subject. Bediako believes Western missionaries failed to see 'much continuity in relationship' between Africa's pre-Christian religious heritage and Christianity nor did they even see it as 'a preparation of the Gospel'.⁴⁰ This African religious past, 'is not so much a chronological past, as an "ontological" past.' Bediako states:

The point of the theological importance of such an ontological past consists in the fact that it belongs together with the profession of the Christian faith in giving account of the same entity, namely, the history of the religious consciousness of the African Christian. It is in this sense that the theological concern with the pre-Christian religious heritage becomes an effort aimed at clarifying the nature and meaning of African Christian identity. (1992:4)

Bediako argues that a 'relationship of continuity' with this heritage must be emphasised over and against 'discontinuity with Christian belief.' Bediako and other theologians

³⁹ Bediako regards Clement of Alexandria as innovative for his insights about the integration of Hellenistic culture into Christianity and for seeing Christ as the key to humankind's religious story. Justin also expressed openness to finding points of contact in Greco-Roman society. He taught that the, or seed-bearing word, had been planted in every culture since 'all things were created through him and with him' (John 1, Colossians 1). This image of the *Logos* offered to Bediako a positive way of envisioning a dynamic encounter between Christianity and non-Christian philosophies or religions (Bediako 1992:124; Shorter 1988:75-87). Bediako sees E. Bolaji Idowu as the strongest modern affirmer of the radical continuity between the pre-Christian African tradition and Christianity. John Mbiti shares an appreciation of the religious values in traditional African religion but sees the African tradition only as a *preparatio evangelica*. It is likely that Bediako saw himself in between these two colleagues on the continuity-discontinuity spectrum; he echoes Mbiti's comment: 'the man of Africa' in meeting with the Christian Gospel, 'will not have very far to go before he begins to walk on familiar ground' (Bediako 1995:214).

⁴⁰ A memorable example, says Bediako, is that of the World Missionary Conference held in Edinburgh in 1910, where non-Western primal religious traditions were identified as varieties of animism. Participant W.H.T Gairdner famously described animism as 'the religious beliefs of more or less backward and degraded peoples all over the world' (2008:6).

reason that they must account for Africa's cultural and religious past and cannot begin with pejorative categories both western and anthropological.⁴¹ For Bediako, the

issue of identity is at the heart of the proper task of theology ... For theological consciousness presupposes religious tradition and tradition requires memory and memory is integral to identity: without memory we have no past and if we have no past, then we lose our identity.⁴² (Bediako 1996c:58)

So in Bediako's theology, Christian identity finds a third possibility, namely, that the gospel in some sense creates an entirely new synthesis or phenomenon out of the old elements of culture by subsuming them into an entirely new mode of thinking.⁴³ The new mode is the gospel and the process is called conversion or translation.

Bediako joins Walls and especially Sanneh in emphasising the role of Scripture in the vernacular for the process of conversion and assimilation. Language becomes a theological category and people hearing God's word in their own tongues are able to 'drink from their own wells'.⁴⁴ Bediako argues that translation is more than merely linguistic; it gives birth to 'new idioms and categories of thought' as a vernacular encounters the word of the Scriptures. These categories and idioms can be new expressions of biblical truth and can therefore illuminate Scripture in new ways. The question remains how one assesses the new categories and idioms in the African setting?⁴⁵ In terms of measuring response Bediako offers particular critiques of the four African theologians he studies in terms of continuity and discontinuity.

⁴¹ Bediako reports, 'Terms like "fetish", "animist", "polytheistic", "primitive", "uncivilised", and "lower"-these were the Western intellectual categories devised to describe and interpret African religious tradition...' (1996c:59).

⁴² Bediako goes on to explain: 'At the heart of the new theological method would be the issue of identity, which would itself be perceived as a theological category, which would therefore entail confronting constantly the question as to how far the 'old' and the 'new' in African religious consciousness could become integrated into a unified vision of what it meant to be African and Christian. The issue of identity in turn forced the theologian to become the locus of this struggle for integration through a dialogue that, if it was to be authentic, was bound to become personal and so infinitely more intense. This theological task and method would yield 'Christian self-definition', since the African scholar himself will be engaged in 'a dialogue' with 'the perennial religions and spiritualities of Africa' (1996c:60).

⁴³ Bediako posits a distinctive first century 'Christian identity' distinct from Jewish faith and pagan superstition (Bediako 1992:19).

⁴⁴ Bediako (2003:17) uses the title of the book by Gustavo Gutierrez.

⁴⁵ Bediako concludes his discussion of theology and identity by claiming that 'African Theology has now overturned virtually every negative verdict passed on African tradition by the ethnocentrism of the

He links B. Kato's theology to his Evangelical heritage associated with Western Faith Missions and a radical Biblicism.⁴⁶ Bediako sees Kato representing radical discontinuity because he rejects any positive evaluation of pre-Christian religion. Kato himself asserts, 'Christianity cannot incorporate any man-made religion' (Kato in Bediako 1992:390). At the other end of the spectrum, Bediako regards Bolaji Idowu and Vincent Mulago to be Indigenisers. He contends that Idowu wrongly emphasises Christianity's foreignness and that Mulago believes African faithfulness to ancestral traditions is primary. Bediako finds common ground in the work of his fourth representative theologian, John Mbiti, whom he identifies as a Translator.⁴⁷

4.4.2 *Christian Africa*

Bediako's large-scale case study of a translated faith in terms of theology and identity paves the way for the future of African theology. Such a theology moves past the indigenisation stage toward reconstruction. Such a theology uses local materials and exhibits both similarity and difference to missional religion imported from the colonial power churches in the West. Sanneh says of Bediako:

he shows the need to reconnect the new Christianity in Africa to the preceding cultural heritage, with its accommodating, pluralist ethos. The changing face of Christianity reflects patterns of renewal grounded in local priorities rather than in Enlightenment rationality or the superpower centre of gravity of American dominance. (Sanneh 2008:10)

The pioneering works of E. Bolaji Idowu of Nigeria and John S. Mbiti of Kenya focus primarily on African concepts of God, his activities, and his presence in Africa.⁴⁸

Western missionary enterprise' (Bediako 1992:439). This is Bediako's primary aim—to respond to western suspicion about African theologies and to make the case for appreciating Christian identity in light of Africa's primal past.

⁴⁶ Bediako cites Timothy Njokya who says of Kato: 'Byang Kato's fear of African religion and philosophy is genuinely rooted in his evangelical tradition. Evangelicalism in Africa claims itself to be cultureless, timeless, and unhistorical in order to cover up the fact that it is American and conservative' (Bediako 1992:387).

⁴⁷ Bediako also has praise for the work of Harry Sawyerr and Kwesi Dickson (1994:16-17).

⁴⁸ Idowu wrote two major books: *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief* (1962) and *African Traditional Religion; a Definition* (1973). The works of Mbiti are: *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969),

The biblical phrase from Acts 14:17a, ‘Nevertheless He did not leave Himself without a witness,’ is cited to demonstrate the universality of God, his creative activities, presence, and revelation in the African traditional religions. Two understandings of God that Bediako finds necessary to emphasise are God as creator and God as redeemer. Bediako wants to balance the theology of universal creation with the biblical theology of the fall, sin, and redemption. The study of traditional African religion highlights religious beliefs, practices, ceremonies, and rituals that belong to the categories of creation theology and general revelation.⁴⁹ Creation motifs and themes can be seen as preparatory for the Christian gospel in a way similar to the Old Testament declaring God’s promises that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. Bediako notes that the redeemer in the biblical story also is the creator. Bediako says, ‘Accepting Jesus as “our Saviour” always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings’ (Bediako 1990:15ff).

In chapter 4 of *Christianity in Africa*, Bediako echoes Sanneh’s work on indigenous languages in terms of the African context. Bediako sees divine speech as vernacular; the Pentecost-God speaks, and speaks always in vernacular as opposed to speaking in one holy esoteric language for revelation. Translation has, therefore, two important consequences: ‘this imbued local cultures with eternal significance and endowed African languages with a transcendent range’ as well as presumed that ‘the God of the Bible had preceded the missionary into the receptor-culture, so that the missionary needed to discover Him in the receptor-culture.’ Bediako makes the claim that it is in

Concepts of God in Africa (1970), *The Prayers of African Religion* (1975), and *Prayers and Spirituality in African Religion* (1978).

⁴⁹ Bediako makes few references to actual examples linked to African traditional religions. He discusses ‘polygamy’ (1995:183-5), the sacralisation of power (1995:180-2, 1990:25-29), monotheism and Yoruba mythology (1992:286-9), and drumming in worship (1990:31-2). He relies in part on research by John S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (1979), K. A. Busia, ‘The Ashanti’ in Darylle Forde (ed), *African Worlds—Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples* (1954), Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect—Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (1974), E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olodumare—God in Youruba Belief* (1962), and Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep Forest—Prayers and Praises of Akua Kuma* (1981).

the translated ‘vernacular Bible’ that Africans were able to discover that ‘Christianity had, in fact, been adequately anticipated’ (Bediako 1998:54, 1995:109-25).

4.4.3 Primal Religions

Bediako states his wish to explore whether ‘primal religions are the most fertile soil for the Gospel’ and ‘underlie therefore the Christian faith of the vast majority of Christians of all ages and all nations’ (Bediako 1995:viii-ix). Bediako seeks to understand these indigenous materials for African Christianity and African theology (Bediako 1995:91-108). Mbiti’s book, *The Prayers of African Religion*, draws praise from Bediako who claims that Africa’s religious tradition is not documented by creeds or formal definitions of faith but by prayers, testimonies and stories (Bediako 1992:321).⁵⁰

Bediako builds on the work of Andrew Walls and Harold Turner African to show how primal religions inform African Christian theology.⁵¹ He notes Harold Turner’s observation that

the African field throws new light on old issues because it yielded data both vital and contemporary ... Whereas the western world’s religious phenomena seems easily explained in Enlightenment categories, the forms of Christianity in Africa are a veritable laboratory for anthropology, theology, culture studies, sociology, etc.⁵² (Bediako 1996a:20)

Turner’s classic work, *Living Tribal Religions* (1977), proposes a six-feature framework for understanding primal religions as authentically religious rather than merely as epiphenomena of the social organizations of preliterate societies.⁵³

1. A kinship with nature in which plants and animals have their place in the universe as interdependent parts of a whole; thus humans respect and even reverence their environment.

⁵⁰ Bediako and others also refer to Africa’s primal religions as African Traditional Religions and they use the phrases ‘primal imagination,’ ‘primal worldview’ and ‘primal’ or ‘ontological’ past to describe the religious sensibility expressed by the primal religions.

⁵¹ See the essay by Walls titled, ‘Primal Religious Traditions in Today’s World.’ First published in 1987, the essay appears in Walls 1996:119-39. Walls discusses the place of traditional religions in Africa’s history in ‘African Christianity in the History of Religions’ (Walls 2002a:119-35).

⁵² See Walls (2002:133) where he refers to Africa as ‘a great theological library’ dealing with issues—‘literally--of life and death...’

⁵³ See Walls, ‘Primal Religious Traditions in Today’s World’ in *Religion in Today’s World*, Frank Whaling (ed), 1987. See also Frank L. Cox, *From Primitive to Indigenous: The Academic Study of Indigenous Religions*, 2007.

2. The deep sense that man is finite, weak, and impure or sinful and thereby stands in need of a power not his own.
3. The conviction that man is not alone in the universe but lives in a spiritual world of powers or beings more powerful than those of a human being.
4. The belief that man can enter into relationship with the benevolent spirit world and receive blessings and protection.
5. The acute sense of the reality of the afterlife leads to convictions about the dead and ancestors.
6. The conviction that man lives in a sacramental universe where there is no sharp dichotomy between the physical and the spiritual.

Bediako argues that primal religions in Africa represent an African understanding of a single-tiered universe in contrast to a modern Western view that dichotomises the sacred and the secular⁵⁴ (Bediako 1995:176). Primal cultural heritage is ‘the very place where Christ desires to meet us in order to transform us into his own image’ (Bediako 2008:7). He sees indigenous languages that convey the life of primal heritages as crucial bridges between the primal and the Christian worldviews. He believes that primal religion as the ‘Christian substructure’ is carried in indigenous languages (2008:7).

The translated scriptures in mother-tongue idioms allow for an on-going dialogue between the gospel and culture in Africa, in all settings.⁵⁵ Bediako notes that the use of indigenous languages has been of particular significance for the African Independent Churches. Conversely, this may explain the failures of the vernacular churches of missionary origin: they did not embrace enough translation.

Bediako and Mbiti’s appreciation of Africa’s primal past as a key dimension of African theology is not without its critics. Historian Adrian Hastings registers a concern that starting from Africa’s primal past might diminish a sufficient emphasis on African Christology. The area of Christology, crucial for any Christian theology, moves Bediako to consider a key socio-religious African category, the ancestors, in light of Christ’s person and work. Pondering whether ancestor theology is related to the Anglican

⁵⁴ Bediako draws upon John V. Taylor’s *The Primal Vision—Christian Presence Amid African Religion* (1963) to describe a crucial dimension of the African understanding of reality before, during and after the arrival of Western missionaries and colonisers (Bediako 1994:57).

⁵⁵ ‘The possession of the Christian Scriptures in African languages... ensured that there did take place an effectual rooting of the Christian faith in African consciousness. This, in turn, ensured also that a deep and authentic dialogue would ensue between the Gospel and African tradition, authentic in so far as it would take place, not in the terms of a foreign language or of an alien culture, but in the categories of local languages, idioms and worldviews’ (Bediako 1996c:64).

doctrine of the communion of the saints, Bediako differs from the view of E. Fashole-Luke that stresses ‘the holy sacraments’ and instead links the communion of the saints with the ‘cloud of witnesses’ mentioned in chapters 11 and 12 of The Letter to the Hebrews (Bediako 1995:210-229).

Bediako espouses an African spirituality that recognises the validity of African terms or translations for Jesus.⁵⁶ Bediako cites fellow African theologians and attributes two such Christological titles: Eldest Brother (Sawyerr) and Ancestor/Great Ancestor (Pobee, Nyamiti, Bujo and Bediako). He opines that these titles are neither from below nor from above, rather they are indicative of how the primal imagination grasps the reality of Christ in a holistic sense, namely as a living power in the spirit realm (Bediako 1995:176). Benezet Bujo, a Central African Catholic theologian, proposes referring to Jesus as the ‘proto-ancestor’ to indicate that Jesus ‘infinitely transcended’ the ideal of the God-fearing African ancestors.⁵⁷

Bediako’s tendency is to look to Jesus’ universality rather than to his particularity as a Jew. He affirms that Jesus’ incarnation was the incarnation of the saviour for all people and all nations, and of all times. He claims that salvation in Jesus is from the Jews but is not Jewish. Jesus, bearing the image of God the Father, by becoming human, shares our human heritage. His good news story is a story for all people and one that reveals a universal Great Ancestor. Bediako goes on to read the Letter to the Hebrews in such a way that Jesus’ death is seen to set all peoples free. Thus Jesus the Saviour can

⁵⁶ Diane B. Stinton, a Canadian professor, has written a study of contemporary African Christology that follows the trajectory envisioned by Bediako. For her 2004 book, *Jesus of Africa: Voice of Contemporary African Theology*, she interviewed both African academics and uneducated Africans and reported that Africans are utilizing terminology from their indigenous setting to interpret the meaning of Jesus Christ. She claims that modern African Christology is in a second phase, which begins after 1980 and features bolder use of indigenous language and categories for Christological reflection and expression. She classifies Jesus as ancestor and mediator under the category of Jesus as Mediator; she puts the titles king/chief and liberator in a category called Jesus as Leader; her other broad categories are Jesus as Loved One and Jesus as Life-Giver (2004:vii-viii).

⁵⁷ Parratt lauds Bujo’s concept as being in accord with the African worldview and consonant with trinitarian thought. (Parratt 1995:130-31). Diane Stinton (2004:119-23) quotes Bujo from a personal interview with him. ‘You cannot define Christology as such in Africa unless you describe it. You cannot define it as in classical philosophy, because I think African Christology is not yet shaped like that in Europe. We are trying to open many ways for African Christology or African understandings of Christ.’

be seen as the African Elder Brother who has shared in the African experience in every respect, except in the sin and alienation of humans from God. Being the Elder Brother in the presence of God, Jesus the Great Ancestor eliminates the need for mediation by the natural spirit fathers. For these ancestors themselves needed saving since they originated among the rest of humanity (Bediako 1990:16-20).

Okot p'Bitek, representing a non-Christian view, levels a criticism that African theologians building on the primal past are seeking to make Christian that which is fundamentally non-Christian. Missiologist T.S. Maluleke of South Africa contends that Bediako's insistence on the primacy of primal religions or the African past is 'old hat.' Maluleke wonders if the Mbiti-Bediako assignment of the primal past as *preparatio evangelica* goes far enough. Bediako, says Maluleke, is wary of seeing African traditions as systems and prefers to view them as traditions waiting to be fulfilled by the Christian gospel (1997:216-17). These questions prompt additional ones for today's African theologians. Will non-Christian critics ignore or disdain traditional religions in order to pursue a secular and intellectual agnosticism? Might African social scientists affirm and promote traditional religions untouched and unconverted by Christianity as the authentic African religion?

Like his colleague and mentor, Andrew Walls, Bediako tends to paint with a broad brush. This reader would like to find in the Bediako corpus more information about criteria regarding African primal traditions in light of biblical revelation. One of Bediako's rare examples or what he calls a 'grassroots discovery,' is an explanation of a Bible translation that turns on the *Twi* word *dwira*, meaning 'purify' in context of understanding Hebrews 1:3 (Bediako 1995:70ff.).⁵⁸ Bediako's contribution here is

⁵⁸ The phrase in Hebrews 1:3 reads 'when he had made purification for sins' in the NRSV. The *Twi* translation nods toward the variant reading and adds *di' heautou* before the phrase thus making clear that Jesus, the subject of the sentence, was indeed the instrument of the forgiveness. Bediako explains that the *Twi* verb, *dwirra*, requires the 'explicit declaration' of the indirect object. Furthermore, this verb '*dwirra*' links to the traditional New Year festival called *Odwira* that is a festival of purification and renewal. Bediako tells of colleagues associating *Odwira* with Jesus and wondering if the atoning work of Jesus

primarily one of introducing the importance of the primal maps; others need to take the discussion further.⁵⁹

4.4.4 Conclusion

i. identity and primal religions

Bediako's insistence that an African Christian does not require a western identity or theology accords with the apostle Paul's insistence that first century Gentiles need not submit to circumcision and Torah. The fruitful work of Christian self-definition requires an appreciation of the scriptural deposit, a familiarity with various traditions of interpretation or theologies, and self-awareness about one's own cultural matrix. I contend that Bediako seeks a middle way that genuinely values Africa's pre-Christian past without championing the primal religions apart from conversion and Christian norms. He declares, 'Our project is about the conversion of primal religion—not its destruction or abolition, but rather the past, converting what makes us who we are, including the mental maps of the universe with which we all operate' (Bediako 2008:2). Bediako's case would be stronger if he offered more examples of the Christian conversion of primal elements.⁶⁰ He goes a little bit beyond Mbiti's view of the primal as preparatory for the Gospel and sees the primal religions as providing indigenous materials for constructing an authentically African theology. Bediako stops short of associating African divinities, ancestors, symbols and works of power as revelatory in and of themselves.⁶¹

could be related to the traditional *Odwira* rituals and its expected benefits. See Frank Adams' 2010 work, *Odwira and the Gospel*, especially chapters 7, 10 and 11.

⁵⁹ Gillian M. Bediako, Bediako's widow, has published *Primal Religion and the Bible: William Robertson Smith and his Heritage* (Sheffield, 1997), a study of Smith's nineteenth century approach to exploring biblical religion and its affinity with primal religion.

⁶⁰ I noted examples gleaned from Bediako's views on Christology, the ancestors and the Letter to the Hebrews. See section 4.4.4.

⁶¹ Bediako is in substantial agreement with the writings of Walls on the traditional religions although he takes the discussion further vis-à-vis Africa. Walls concludes that the Christian period in Africa has brought change in two spheres: the reordering of worldview, and the introduction of new symbols and sources (Walls 2002a:123).

Bediako's theology does raise questions of whether he is too contextual regarding primal religions on the one hand or too biblical in his Christology on the other.⁶² In his work on primal religions Bediako speaks often of 'continuity' but seldom invokes 'discontinuity' as a term or category. Are primal traditions merely preparatory for the gospel or are they in some way constitutive of African Christianity?⁶³ Should greater discernment and care be taken to evaluate elements that are persistently pagan or sub-Christian? One critic claimed to experience a tension between 'the critical African theologian' and 'the traditional biblical evangelist'.⁶⁴ I view these concerns as two poles on the spectrum of adjudicating issues of gospel and culture. I already have signalled that I think Bediako is right in seeing the primal religious tradition primarily as supplying indigenous materials and categories for converting to Christ. Bediako builds a credible theology that envisions a serious dialogue between Christian religious affirmations and indigenous cultural materials. His reticence about the category of 'discontinuity' between the primal heritage and Christianity, however, is ameliorated by his consistently biblical insistence on orthodox Christology.

On the other hand he does not address adequately the potentialities of the primal sensibility to guide or misguide Africans when primal religion operates independently from the influence of Christianity and Islam. An interest in spiritual forces might go astray in several ways. One, a resurgence of interest in Africa's spiritual heritage might

⁶² Van den Toren (1997:226-28) raises the question of Bediako's Christocentric theology versus his open stance toward African culture. He concludes positively that Bediako understands his 'context' in light of Jesus Christ revealed in the Christian scriptures.

⁶³ David Pym, writing from the Akrofi-Christaller Institute that Bediako founded, offers an assessment of 'primal religions' as a theological category in light of critical comments by James L. Cox. Cox refers to 'primal' as a non-empirical construct devised to serve a theological agenda and an invention of Western academics although any alternatives he proposes probably deserve the same label. He may be right that the criteria used to evaluate primal religions do not reflect closely the complex phenomena of these religions. And he has a point that the sheer number of primal or 'indigenous' religions makes it difficult to find unifying themes without downplaying significant differences among them. The major difference Cox represents vis-à-vis Turner, Walls and Bediako is perspective. Cox sees himself as a 'scientist of religion' whereas Bediako et al study the religions of the tribal or traditional peoples from a theological point of view. Both views may contribute toward understanding although Cox's anti-theological rhetoric and his championing of a so-called scientific method are not persuasive. See D. Pym 2008:60-69.

⁶⁴ See articles by T.S. Maluleke (1997) and H. Wagenaar (1998) that offer critical evaluations of Bediako's theology.

express itself in an unhealthy anxiety about evil powers and a tendency to see all setbacks and misfortunes caused by spiritual warfare. Paul Gifford reports on the widespread fear of evil spirits represented by Emmanuel Eni's work, *Delivered from the Powers of Darkness* (Gifford 2008:280-83). Opoku Oniyanah's PhD thesis offers a case study on the practice of exorcism within a Pentecostal Church in Ghana. He uses interdisciplinary studies to chart an interaction between primal Akan religiosity and an established church utilising anthropological studies on witchcraft (Oniyanah 2002). This researcher wishes Bediako likewise had addressed specific cases of Ghanaian 'primal religiosity'.

A related issue that needs more attention is the problem of unresolved multiplicity in Africa's wider spirit world of primal religions and the associated divinities, ancestors, and natural forces, among other aspects. Do the primal religions truly see God as 'One' or as 'many'? African theology, according to Bediako, has failed to wrestle adequately with the multiplicity of the transcendent and has undercut the contribution it can make toward a fresh Christian account of the transcendent (1995:97). Bediako, for his part, argues from his *Akan* experience and claims it is not exceptional. 'In virtually every Christian community in Africa, the Christian name for God is usually a divine name for the Supreme God inherited from the pre-Christian tradition.'⁶⁵ Bediako says little in his publications about Old Testament passages although he invokes the biblical ancestors who 'have an abiding relevance for every succeeding generation' (Bediako 2008:7). He also interacts with OT texts in his exposition of Hebrews (2010:45-57). I would like to read more about texts from the Law and the Prophets that prohibit idolatry among the covenant people.

⁶⁵ Bediako explains that in the Akan understanding, transcendent power is manifested by *Onyame* (God), *nananom nsamanfo* (ancestors or spirit fathers), *abosom* (divinities or lesser deities), and *asuman* (material repositories of impersonal power) but there are no gods but God. He explains that missionaries coined a name for gods derived from *Onyame* but argues that the Akan actually have no gods (*anyame*) although they have *abosom* (spirits or divinities). The confusion over terminology makes the case for better translations.

ii. cultural critique

This reader has wondered if Bediako's appreciation of Africa's primal past has led him to view African culture(s) uncritically. In his writings Bediako says very little that critiques African society and politics. Do these topics lie outside his areas of interest? Part of the answer depends on theological method. Parratt and others divide Christian theology into two spheres: 'African theology' and 'black theology.' The former plumbs the relationship between theology and culture where the latter refers to the work of South Africans to address social and racial concerns in light of apartheid governments (Parratt 1995:25-54). Bediako belongs to the first category and admittedly was drawn to exploring how African culture can be authentically Christian.⁶⁶

Amele Adamavi-Aho Ekue charts the development of what he terms 'the paradigm of the Theology of Reconstruction.' He suggests that African theology is moving beyond the 'crisis of identity' and the concerns of the AIC's and liberation. He points out that it is time for African churches to admit their own implication in interethnic wars like Rwanda and Burundi and their 'subtle legitimisation of oppressive regimes like Liberia. He cites Central African theologian, Ka Mana, as one who is exploring how churches and theologians understand Africans as victims and as actors of the crisis at the same time. Theologians will have 'to reassess the importance of the message of God within a political, economic and socio-cultural context (Ekue 2005:101-12). Valentin Dedji (2003) agrees that what is needed in African theology is a new paradigm of 'reconstruction.' He identifies Bediako as a culture-oriented theologian concerned about 'African Christian identity' but argues the new situation in Africa calls for 'gospel and justice' rather than 'gospel and culture'⁶⁷ (Dedji 2003:1-9).

⁶⁶ One of Bediako's Ghanaian colleagues, theologian Mercy Oduyoye, presents a pioneering voice to raise women's concerns. Her 'Circle of Concerned African Women Theologians' aim to write theology out of their praxis. They do Bible study as part of 'just world and the empowerment of women.' See Oduyoye 2007:3-6.

⁶⁷ Dedji argues for a new theological vision in Africa that builds on the work of Jesse Mugumbi and Ka Mana who represent a 'reconstruction paradigm'. He critiques Mana, however, for discussing justice too

Can we fault Bediako for not joining in this effort? My answer is no and yes. First, he belonged to an older generation of theologians whose primary theological concern was to champion an identity both genuinely Christian and authentically African. He and others of his generation were preoccupied with finding their African theological voices. Secondly, he died at age 62 in 2008 and so his opportunity to produce additional theological reflections ended abruptly and prematurely. Bediako authored only two major works and a number of articles largely based on his teaching and speaking. Thirdly, Bediako does write in several places as a theologian addressing socio-economic and political concerns.⁶⁸

On the other hand there were missed opportunities to address social and political concerns from his carefully crafted theological perspective. In the six years before he died (2008) Bediako's publications were limited to articles and most of these appeared in the journal he founded. The *JACT* index for 2003-2008 lists eight Bediako articles and in one Bediako calls for 'theological scholarship to engage with cultural issues on indigenous terms.' The issues Bediako enumerates but discusses in only the briefest terms are: patriarchy, polygamy, HIV/AIDS, and knowledge vis-à-vis magic or witchcraft (2006:5-6). An important but hitherto unanswered question is whether his appreciation of Africa's religious-cultural heritage prevented him from wielding a

much in terms of 'oppressor and oppressed' (Dedji 2003:7). See also Magesa 2004:171-73 for a brief overview of 'theology in a new key.' See Mark Shaw (1996:259ff) for his discussion of African theology and African nationalism.

⁶⁸ In *Christianity in Africa* Bediako discusses, albeitly briefly, the 'Gospel as Good News to the Poor' (1995:144-48). In chapter 13 of this work, 'Christian Religion and African Social Norms', Bediako comments on Christian contributions that paved the way for modern expressions of African nationalism (1995:234); he discusses the new political task as moving from 'Independence to Democracy' (1995:236-38); he builds on K. A. Busia's analysis of political systems and shows that authoritarian governments in Africa bear linkages to the 'tendency of traditional society to sacralise authority and political office.' Bediako argues for 'the desacrilisation of political power in African society' and believes Christian theology can aid the process. He cites Desmond Tutu, Kenyan church leaders, the Christian Council in Ghana and the Catholic Bishops' Conference approvingly in their respective struggles against apartheid and patterns of injustice (1995:239-48).

sharper cultural critique. More time needs to pass before a proper assessment can be made.⁶⁹

4.5 Summary of Missional Translation

In the publications of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako, I find substantial agreement and overlap of ideas. These three scholars are linked by their respective experiences in Africa and time interacting together at the University of Aberdeen. Andrew Walls is the elder statesman of the group. His early inclinations about the importance of ‘translation’ germinated during his teaching days in Sierra Leone in 1957. Harold Turner began teaching in Sierra Leone at about the same time (1956) and was drawn to studying religious movements in Africa. These two colleagues collaborated together and moved in 1962 to work at the University of Nsukka in Nigeria.

Walls’ joined the faculty at Aberdeen in 1966 at age 38. His colleagues at Aberdeen in the 1970’s included Adrian Hastings and once again, Harold Turner. Lamin Sanneh joined the faculty at Aberdeen in 1978 and was invited by Walls to teach a course in world Christian history. Sanneh also had served as a teacher for one year at Fourah Bay College in Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1974-75.⁷⁰ Sanneh spent three years at Aberdeen before accepting an appointment to Harvard. During those years it dawned on him that ‘Christianity is a form of indigenous empowerment by virtue of vernacular translation’ (Sanneh 2012:216).

⁶⁹ Several Bediako articles have been published posthumously. There may be additional unpublished materials yet to appear.

⁷⁰ Sanneh 2012:211-16.

Bediako began his studies on ‘theology and identity’ at Aberdeen under Walls’ tutelage.⁷¹ Walls and Turner influenced Bediako to do his own creative work on African identity and primal religiosity vis-à-vis Christianity.⁷² Bediako returned to Ghana after his PhD studies, served as pastor of a church in Accra and then founded the Akrofi-Christaller Centre promoting research in theology, mission and culture.

I have noted that I view the work of these three mission historians as comprising an incipient construct of mission as translation. In their days together at Aberdeen they interacted with one another and with Adrian Hastings and Harold Turner. Turner’s work on primal religions certainly influenced Bediako. I suspect that Hastings was an influence upon Walls and Sanneh.⁷³ Walls has been generous in praising both Sanneh and Bediako. In turn the younger colleagues acknowledge the influence of Walls as mentor and as a historian of world Christianity. I do find it interesting that Sanneh and Bediako say comparatively little about each other in acknowledgements, citations and bibliographies. This is why I describe the overall relationship among the three scholars as asymmetrical.

Sanneh makes only a few references to Bediako’s works and these are mostly in articles. He does include a chapter written by Bediako on Ghana in his 2005 work, *The Changing Face of Christianity*. The only book in Bediako’s corpus significantly making mention of Sanneh’s work is *Christianity in Africa* (1995).⁷⁴ Because the three have

⁷¹ In 1978 Walls, Sanneh and Bediako began their three-year tenure together at Aberdeen. Sanneh left to join the faculty at Harvard in 1981. Bediako completed his dissertation in 1983. In the published version of his dissertation (1992) Bediako acknowledges Walls’ considerable influence as well as that of Adrian Hastings and John Mbiti. Sanneh’s name does not appear in the acknowledgements or in the bibliography. Sanneh is cited eleven times, however, in Bediako’s 1995 book on Christianity in Africa. On the other hand, Bediako does not get a mention in Sanneh’s *Translating the Message* (2009) or his *Disciples of All Nations* (2008).

⁷² Walls’ essay, ‘Primal Religious Traditions in Today’s World’ first appeared in a volume edited by Frank Whaling in 1987. Harold Turner’s research on the Church of the Lord (*Aladura*) was published in 1967. He published an article on independent religious movements in Africa in 1969 in the *Journal of Religion in Africa*--a journal founded by Walls in 1967. I contend that this early work on primal religions by Walls and Turner influenced Bediako and steered him toward the choice of his own subjects for doctoral studies. Bediako’s dissertation was completed in 1983.

⁷³ Bill Burrows, former editor at Orbis Books, made mention of Adrian Hastings’ influence on Walls and Sanneh (private email correspondence on 16 January 2014).

⁷⁴ Bediako cites Sanneh eleven times and Walls fourteen times. The book is dedicated to Andrew Walls.

been together in so many academic venues, their ideas about translation likely have coalesced in a way that exhibits mutual influence and interdependence. Together they are a group of influential scholars particularly interested in how indigenous people translate the gospel. I reiterate my belief that it is Andrew Walls who is the chief influencer. Walls is a regular guest instructor at Bediako's Akrofi-Christaller Centre in Ghana. Walls and Sanneh jointly convene the 'Yale-Edinburgh Group on the History of the Mission Movement and World Christianity', an annual conference devoted to mission history with special emphasis on documentary sources (Bonk 2011:69-70).

For Andrew Walls the key to his view of translation is the biblical concept of incarnation, classically articulated in the Gospel of John (John 1:14). Jesus the Incarnate One has been understood historically in various ways and those understandings have been expressed by numerous images by people in diverse cultures. The Pauline metaphor, 'the full stature of Christ', pictures a larger and fuller understanding of the incarnate One as a result of on-going gospel translations.⁷⁵ Walls continues to influence other scholars to study indigenous Christian expressions and he promotes scholarship about archives, indigenous Christian art and Christian bibliography.⁷⁶

For Lamin Sanneh the key to translation is linguistic translatability that highlights vernacular translation of the scriptures.⁷⁷ Beginning with the Pentecost account, Sanneh argues from the efficacy of many translations, scriptural forms of revelation, such that no one is a privileged translation. The absence of the scriptures in the language of the

⁷⁵ Such understandings of Jesus may or may not conform to orthodox criteria. Creeds and confessions have helped historical churches to articulate criteria for catechetical and theological purposes. Miguez Bonino edited a book with the title *Jesus: Neither Defeated nor Celestial Monarch* in order to draw attention to false images of Christ in popular religiosity. Anton Wessels has contributed *Images of Jesus: How Jesus Is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures* (1986) and Robert Schreier has edited a volume titled *Faces of Jesus in Africa* (1991). See also *Jesus in Global Contexts* (1992) edited by Priscilla Pope-Levinson and John R. Levinson.

⁷⁶ See chapter 13 in Walls 1996:173ff. Cf also Bonk 2012:61ff for examples about Walls' interest in networking, collaboration and the 'Documentation, Archives, Bibliography and Oral History' (DABOH) project carried out under the auspices of IAMS.

⁷⁷ Sanneh locates an interesting reference to Arnold Toynbee regarding the phrase 'mission as translation' (Sanneh 1989:82-3). Toynbee, writing in 1956, ponders how the Christian faith was recast in Hellenistic terms and uses the concept of translation in a holistic way that includes scripture translation and conceptual translation.

founder and the lack of one Christian geographical centre buttresses the case for a proliferation of gospel transmissions by vernacular translation. John Azumah agrees with Sanneh that the Christian Gospel is not to be quarantined in a particular culture or geographical location but translated into every language and culture. He points out, however, that church history tells stories about guardians of orthodoxy who put up fierce resistance to translation efforts.⁷⁸

For Kwame Bediako the search for an authentic African Christian identity leads him to consider vernacular translation as the bridge between the ancient gospel and primal African religions. He assesses and endorses Sanneh's conclusions with only a hint of a disagreement. Bediako wishes that Sanneh might have pursued further the investigation of the relationship of African primal religions to Christianity in the highly Islamised areas of Africa. He credits Sanneh with placing both missionary transmission and indigenous assimilation under the overarching concept of *missio Dei* and away from discussions of the impact of western missions on the non-Western world. Thus, the Christian religion is rescued from a western possessiveness of it, and yet missionary endeavour can still be appreciated for stimulating a genuine indigenous Christian tradition in terms of the *missio Dei* in the local setting (Bediako 1995:122). In his work on 'theology and identity' Bediako's sympathies lie with Mbiti's theology and he belongs to the same middle way of translation.

The following is my summary of the primary elements gleaned from studying the mission writings of Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako:

1. Jesus' incarnation is seen as paradigmatic translation (Walls 1996:26).
2. 'Conversion' is understood as the turning toward Christ (Walls 1996:29).
3. Christianity (translated) stimulates the vernacular: deep connections are forged between Bible translating and related issues such as cultural self-understanding,

⁷⁸ Azumah contends that at times, 'translation' was forced upon Christians and that the journey of the Christian Bible has not been a smooth one. He gives as an example the battle over an English Bible translation effort that involved, John Tyndale, John Hus and John Wycliffe (Azumah 2012:61-77).

vernacular pride, social awakening, religious renewal, cross-cultural dialogue, and reciprocity in mission (Sanneh 1989:52-3, 2009:57-61).

4. Christian identity always belongs at the heart of gospel and culture issues in the conversion situation; ‘one can be African and Christian’ (Bediako 1992:136ff).

5. A role exists for primal or indigenous elements; the convert uses indigenous materials for translating the gospel and Christian theology (Walls 1996:119ff; Bediako 1995:145ff).

6. Each new translation expands the understanding of the gospel, but must bear a ‘family resemblance’ in order to be a faithful translation (Walls 1996:54; Sanneh 2009:244-51).

Among these six elements, I attribute four to Andrew Walls in full or in part. Sanneh and Bediako are linked to two elements. The combined insights of Walls, Sanneh and Bediako offer an important beginning to a conceptual view of translation vis-a-vis cross-cultural mission. I find few published critiques of Walls’ work although I have noted several critiques of Sanneh and Bediako. The most important critique of missional translation comes from Stephen Bevans although it is focused on a certain understanding of translation. Robert Schreiter and several others join Bevans in critiquing what they label, ‘the translation model’. Bevans describes the model in several of his works on contextual theology.⁷⁹

4.6 The Critique of Translation from Contextual Theology

I describe below the contours of the translation model critique represented by Bevans and others.⁸⁰ Bevans claims that practitioners of the translation model believe there is a discernible content to be translated and transmitted (Bevans 2009:171). Translators use

⁷⁹ See Bevans’ work on models of contextual theology (2002:37-53). See also his more recent works (2004, 2009, 2011).

⁸⁰ I will offer an answer to this critique in Chapter Nine, pp

a method of discerning the essence of the gospel, then clothing it with new trappings from the receiving culture. The images and analogies that practitioners of translation models use, he argues, are those of a kernel and husk or a seed planted into new soil, where the missionary simply inserts this package of gospel essentials into the new setting. Bevans and Robert Schreiter both consider such a supra-cultural or supra-contextual view of the Christian message naïve and problematic because of the difficulty of separating the gospel message from its incarnate forms that have accumulated across centuries and cultures (Bevans 2009:173, Schreiter 1985:8).

I resist calling the gospel supra-cultural because the person, work, and story of Jesus, the incarnate One, come to us imbedded in the first-century context of Palestine. Yet it is not culture bound because of its inherent translatability. God's good news is what addresses cultures, critiques cultures, and finds a home in cultures. I agree, nonetheless, that this issue is one that may be linked to the understandings of Walls, Sanneh and Bediako. Their terms, 'family resemblance' and 'translatability' imply an essential gospel. Their emphasis on the gospel's 'core content', however, is better described as a concern for the integrity of the gospel.

Bevans argues that this model takes the traditional content of the gospel most seriously yet deems that it is more important to be faithful to an essential content than to be creative in a new setting. Bevans argues that the translation model understands revelation as propositional, as a message to be adapted to a new context.⁸¹ Thus, the translator is always beginning with the propositional content of the gospel, then trying to insert it in a context. The older terms, 'adaption' and 'accommodation' underscore the method to make the gospel fit into a new context. Bevans offers Pope John Paul II, American Evangelicals, Charles Kraft and David Hesselgrave, the African theologian

⁸¹ Bevans argues that revelation is not just a message from God or a list of doctrinal propositions. He contends for understanding revelation as a manifestation of God's presence and regards the Bible primarily as a record of that manifesting presence at particular times and places, namely, Israel and the early Church (Bevans 2002:44).

Tite Tineou, and the Malaysian bishop Hwa Yung, as exemplars of this translation model. He also includes historical figures as belonging to this model, namely, Cyril and Methodius plus the Jesuits, Ricci and de Nobili⁸² (Bevans 2009:171-4). It is important to note, in response, that all theology has universal and context-transcending dimensions. Bosch warns that the danger of ‘absolutism of contextualism’ also exists and that third world contextual theologies may be universalised in the present and future, even as western theology was so elevated in the past (1991:428).

Bevans and Schreiter also critique the translation model for what Bevans regards as a naïve view of culture and for what Schreiter terms ‘a positivist view of culture’ (Schreiter 1985:8). Both argue that translation practitioners see cultures as roughly similar to one another and assume parallels, whereas significant cultural differences and distances exist across the globe. This argument is a serious one, and it prompts the missionary to study the deep structures of a receptor culture and to proceed cautiously, keeping in mind that the missionary is reading the gospel through his or her own cultural assumptions (Bevans 1992:43). I have mentioned earlier that typologies of culture are many and complex. I believe that the conversations of anthropologists and sociologists, as well as the contributions of theologians and missionaries, are producing more sophisticated views of culture for practitioners of all contextual models.⁸³

Bevans divides theological approaches into two large camps: creation-based theologies and redemption-based theologies (1992:21). He refers to his theology as ‘sacramental’, indicating that God can reveal Godself to us ‘at any moment, through any kind of object or experience or person’ (Bevans 2009:20). Bevans’ creation-based and sacramentally-oriented theological position appears to follow the Thomistic tradition in

⁸² Bevans does not include any mention of Walls or Sanneh in *Models of Contextual Theology* (2002). Because he does not interact particularly with Walls and Sanneh, I contend that some of the nuances in the arguments and ideas of Walls and his colleagues do not fit the ‘translation model of contextual theology’ as Bevans has constructed it. In his 2009 book, *Theology in Global Perspective*, Bevans suggests Walls might belong to the anthropological model despite his writings on translation. My view is that he has misinterpreted Walls on this matter.

⁸³ See my Section 2.2 on ‘The Concept of Culture,’ p 35ff.

that it sees the creation and human reason tarnished by sin, but not corrupted by it. Protestant and Reformed theologies tend to register the effects of sin on humankind in a way that assumes more devastating consequences; hence, Protestants posit that the *imago Dei* desperately needs redemption and sanctification. I believe Bevans, a Roman Catholic theologian, has a more optimistic view of creation and context as vehicles for God's manifesting work that Protestant and Evangelical scholars do not share.

Bevans' critique appreciates present-day experience, or context, over against past experience, or tradition. 'Revelation does not drop out of the sky as a series of truths; it comes to us in experience in concrete, existential encounter' (Bevans 2009:18). Although Schreiter is not nearly as emphatic about his Roman Catholic theological roots, his focus on local theologies similarly highlights context and experience. A strength of his critique is the alertness that advocates of contextualisation have for issues of justice in local contexts. Another strength of the critique is the emphasis on indigenous agency in mission and upon the work of local theologians. I have alluded to John Parratt's observation that the various contextual theology terms are derived from European languages. This holds true for 'translation' as well. I agree with Parratt that 'the categories of theological development' need to break free from "First World parameters of doing theology' (Parratt 2004:9).

Schreiter believes 'translation approaches are often necessary in the first instance. But in the long run, such a local theology can be called contextual on in a limited sense' (Schreiter 1985:9). Schreiter describes as 'local' a church and its theology that exhibits a 'sensitivity to a cultural context. 'The gospel is always incarnate...' (1985:21). Schreiter states that 'the great respect for culture has a Christological basis.' He sees local theologies depending 'as much on finding Christ already active in the culture as it does on bringing Christ to the culture.' (Schreiter 1985:29).

CHAPTER FIVE

Applying Polanyi's Tacit Dimension to Mission as Translation

5.1 Introducing Michael Polanyi

Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) was born in Budapest, Hungary, the fifth of six children of Michael Pollacsek and Cecilia Wohl. His family life was marked by a rich and stimulating intellectual world featuring countless discussions about artistic, literary, and social issues. His family's roots belonged to the Austro-Hungarian Empire and he maintained ties with Hungary all his life. His biographers point out, however, that he saw himself more as a citizen of Europe than as a member of any particular nation.¹

His father was a civil engineer, and his mother was the daughter of a Lithuanian scholar. She established a salon in Budapest and became the centre of a circle of poets, painters, and scholars. His two brothers and two sisters all distinguished themselves in pursuit of higher education and learning.² Polanyi was born in March of 1891 one year after the family moved to Budapest; the Polanyis magyarized the family name and entered the social circles of the city's intellectual elites (Mitchell 2006:2).

Despite the family's financial woes³ Polanyi matriculated at the Minta Gymnasium (model school), the leading humanities high school in Budapest, where he studied Hungarian, German, Latin and Greek, religion and philosophy, geography, natural history, geometry, mathematics, and physics. Among the Minta's other noted graduates

¹ The definitive biography of Michael Polanyi was published in 2005 by Oxford University Press (Scott and Moleski 2005). The work was begun by scientist William Taussig Scott (University of Nevada) who began writing after researching the project for 17 years. After his death, theologian Martin X. Moleski completed the volume.

² Polanyi's four older siblings, Mausi, Adolf, Karl, and Sophie were born in Vienna. The sixth child Paul was mentally retarded and must have been institutionalised at an early age (Scott and Moleski 2005:12).

³ Polanyi's father suffered a catastrophic business loss when steady rains washed out a rail line his firm was building from the Danube Valley into Slovakia and Poland. The family hoped for a return to prosperity but those hopes were dashed when the elder Pollacsek died suddenly after contracting pneumonia in the winter of 1905.

were Edward Teller and Eugene Wigner (Scott and Moleski 2005:15-16).

Polanyi's accomplishments at school were set in motion by his precociousness at an early age. Michael was multilingual by the age of 6 years, speaking Hungarian, German, and French. He learned enough English at home to read a magazine from England and to begin reading Shakespeare. Polanyi appreciated poetry as a young boy and memorized poems in all four languages he spoke. Although poetry and literature captured Polanyi's interest, science became his chief intellectual satisfaction. Later he declared that physics and art were his favourite school subjects (Scott and Moleski 2005:10-11).

Polanyi's education continued at the University of Budapest where he enrolled to study medicine. There he joined the Galileo Circle, a student organisation that combined scientific pursuits with an exploration of social, economic, and political issues, and whose first president was Polanyi's brother Karl. Like his mother's salon discussions hosted in the Polanyi home, the Galileo Circle promoted robust dialogue and debate. These early discussion circles influenced Polanyi's notion of the importance of camaraderie and mutuality that he later called 'conviviality' (Scott and Moleski 2009:129, 259). Polanyi's first career as a medical doctor gave way to a second career as a physical chemist, and he spent 1913-14 in Karlsruhe, Germany, studying physical chemistry. Polanyi began the First World War serving as a medical officer starting in 1914, but contracted diphtheria and spent several months convalescing. During this convalescence he managed to write and revise several scientific papers. He wrote a paper on thermodynamics that his mentor sent off to Albert Einstein. Polanyi and Einstein exchanged many letters during 1913-15, beginning a correspondence that lasted for 20 years. He translated his paper on the 'adsorption of gases' into Hungarian and eventually submitted it as a doctoral dissertation in 1916.

Chemistry research took him back to Karlsruhe in 1919 and then on to the Institute of

Fiber Chemistry in Berlin in 1920. While in Karlsruhe he met a Hungarian graduate student, Magda Kemeny, and they were married in Budapest in 1921. They had two sons during their years in Berlin. Polanyi moved to the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute in Berlin and began working and corresponding with the best minds in German science. Polanyi laboured alongside such luminaries as Max Planck, Fritz Haber, Ernest Schrodinger, and Albert Einstein. In the early 1930s the rise of Adolph Hitler radically altered Germany's political and social climate; the change unfavourably affected the Jewish population. In 1932 Polanyi initially rejected an offer to set up a department of physical chemistry at the University of Manchester, but after the Nazi takeover that year, Polanyi reconsidered and moved his family to Manchester, England, in September of 1933.

Polanyi presided over the newly established Manchester University Department of Physical Chemistry. His accomplishments led to his election as a Fellow of the Royal Society in 1944. One year later Polanyi gave the Riddell Lectures at Durham University, which were subsequently published as *Science, Faith and Society*. These lectures displayed Polanyi's convictions that the practice of science depends on both tradition and authority practiced by a community of scientists. In 1947 Polanyi was invited to give the prestigious Gifford Lectures (he finally produced them in 1951-2), and in 1948 Manchester University offered him a chair in social studies. After much success as a researcher and teacher in physical chemistry, Polanyi turned definitively to matters of social thought and philosophy (Mitchell 2006:12-17; Scott and Moleski 2005:214-44).

His last scientific paper appeared in 1949. The questions of economics, human liberty in the face of totalitarianism, political matters, and epistemology occupied Michael Polanyi until he died in 1976. His slim volume in 1946, *Science, Faith and Society*, led directly to his 1958 magnum opus *Personal Knowledge*. With the help of

philosopher Marjorie Grene, Polanyi turned his Gifford Lectures into a mighty treatise on the human enterprise of personal knowing (Prosch 1986:5). Polanyi left the faculty at Manchester in 1959 after his election as a Senior Research Fellow at Oxford's Merton College. Because Oxford philosophy at the time was one of the intellectual homes of logical positivism, Polanyi's unconventional epistemology went largely unnoticed. Nonetheless, he had a busy speaking schedule in 1960. He gave Oxford lectures at Merton College and another series at Edinburgh titled 'Perspectives on Personal Knowing.' He also gave the Eddington Lecture at Cambridge titled 'Beyond Nihilism.' The lecture's publication gave rise to a vigorous response (Scott and Moleski 2005:243-5).

Because of his age (70 years) Polanyi was forced to retire from his position at Merton in 1961. This launched him on a whirlwind travel schedule giving lectures at many institutions, mostly in the United States. He spent a semester at Duke in 1964 where his Terry Lectures became the draft of a small but important volume, *The Tacit Dimension* (1966). Two other works would follow and advance elements of Polanyi's epistemology: *Knowing and Being* (1969), a collection of 14 essays written between 1959 and 1968, and *Meaning* (1975), a collaborative effort with Skidmore College professor Harry Prosch.⁴

Polanyi's theory of personal knowing, a major resource for this research in the field of mission studies, was derived from Polanyi's wide range of intellectual interests. Polanyi never hesitated to delve into or comment upon ideas and subjects that properly belonged to a different professional realm. This interdisciplinary curiosity and the ability to see various lines and points of convergence may be the root for Polanyi's insistence of the personal participation of the knower in the knowing enterprise.

⁴ *Meaning* is based on a series of lectures Polanyi gave at the University of Texas and the University of Chicago in 1969. Prosch prepared Polanyi's lectures for publication and drafted the book in 1973; it was published in 1975. In the Polanyi biography (Scott and Moleski 2005:280-286), Moleski indicates that Polanyi scholar Richard Gelwick has questioned how much of *Meaning* is truly the thought of Polanyi. Polanyi's advanced age, poor health, and use of a co-author may have altered the content.

In his lifetime Michael Polanyi had four careers: medical doctor, physical chemist, social thinker, and philosopher. Leaving medicine early for the attraction of scientific research, he achieved international recognition in his other fields. His talent and breadth of knowledge made him a polymath and prepared him for the philosophical creativity that crowned his life with a vision and proposal for a new theory of knowledge; a theory intended to save advanced scientific culture from its own self-destruction by its dehumanized notion of objective detachment.⁵

5.2 Polanyi's Theological Interpreters

Michael's Polanyi's ideas have been interpreted and applied by a host of thinkers, practitioners, and scholars across numerous disciplines. I mention briefly some of these interpreters to show the breadth of influence Polanyi's thought has achieved in the theological academy. In applying Polanyian insights to mission studies, I find one of Polanyi's interpreters particularly insightful. Missionary theologian Lesslie Newbigin, at the urging of J.H. Oldham, picked up Polanyi's book on epistemology, *Personal Knowledge*, shortly after it was published in 1958. After reading it, Newbigin resolved to reread it every ten years because he found in Polanyi's framework of knowing, rich resources for his own missionary re-engagement with the Western world.

Other interpreters include Scottish theologians T.F. Torrance and Jeremy Begbie plus Cardinal Avery Dulles. Torrance, a distinguished theologian and a member of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, served as executor of Polanyi's academic papers and saw them safely deposited at the University of Chicago (Torrance 1980a:26-33). Avery Dulles, a Roman Catholic theologian, wrote an essay in 1984, in which he claims Polanyi's ideas about 'faith' and 'commitment' in human knowledge yield enormous implications for the church's theology. Polanyi interacted with and was influenced by a number of theologians because of his participation in an intellectual discussion group called The

⁵ In an email (20 September 2012) Richard Gelwick agreed this may be his quote but cannot recall the source. It is similar to published information in Gelwick 1977:31.

Moot.⁶ The musician and theologian, Jeremy Begbie, has applied Polanyian ideas to his work on a theology of the arts. Begbie reads Polanyi on ‘metaphor’ and ‘art’ invoking Polanyi’s application of integration. Polanyi appreciates that a metaphor is construed when one imaginatively integrates two disparate elements into a single novel meaning (Begbie 1991:238, Polanyi and Prosch 1975:76). Polanyi sees the concept of metaphor extending beyond language to works of art.⁷ He utilises I. A. Richard’s terms, frame and story, and sees the frame of a work of art and its story as two subsidiaries integrated into a metaphor that discloses the meaning of a work of art (Begbie 1991:240-43, Polanyi and Prosch 1975:86-8). Begbie endorses the idea that a metaphor is essentially irreducible like a work of art; hence, metaphors are used not just to redescribe but also to disclose for the first time (Soskice 1985:93ff). Begbie’s application of Polanyi’s ideas on metaphor for understanding works of art, suggest to me that translating the gospel also calls for imaginatively integrating subsidiary elements into a single meaning or into a patterned picture.

Michael Polanyi’s critique of western culture and Cartesian objectivism wielded a major influence upon the missiological writings of Lesslie Newbigin, who, after a career of mission work in India, returned to Great Britain in the 1970s and wondered why the British population had turned away from Christian beliefs. Newbigin found in Polanyi’s work an astute critique of both scientism and relativism and became a close reader of Polanyi in an attempt to construct a theology of missionary re-engagement that focused particularly on Western Europe.

Newbigin first cites Polanyi in his own writings in the 1966 book, *Honest Religion for Secular Man* that expresses concern for the rise of secularisation. He prefaces his

⁶ Theologians at The Moot gatherings included Paul Tillich and H. Richard Niebuhr. The Moot was organized and convened by J.H. Oldham from 1938-47. Oldham, a pioneer in the world of Christian mission and ecumenism, served as the first editor of *The International Review of Mission*. Polanyi’s 1959 work, *The Study of Man*, is dedicated to Oldham.

⁷ Polanyi’s final book, *Meaning*, was a collaborative effort with Harry Prosch. One chapter is titled ‘From Perception to Metaphor’ and three chapters are devoted to ideas about art (Polanyi and Prosch 1975:66-82, 82-108).

discussion by declaring: ‘Readers of *Personal Knowledge* by Michael Polanyi ... will recognise in what follows my debt to this book’ (Newbiggin 1966:80). In a subsequent book, *The Other Side of 1984* (1983), Newbiggin continues to explore what secularisation means in terms of analysing the roots of modern culture. Inspired and influenced by Polanyi’s idea of a fiduciary framework, Newbiggin critiques the alignment of Christian dogma and political power in a Constantinian establishment (Newbiggin 1983:3031).⁸ Six years later Newbiggin wrote his mature reflection on the Christian faith in its modern context, namely, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Culture* (1989).⁹ He states in the preface his indebtedness to Polanyi throughout the book and especially in the first five chapters (Newbiggin 1989:x). In chapter 2 Newbiggin suggests five points derived from Polanyi that guide his examination of pluralism:

- (1) The need for Polanyi’s critique of doubt. One is able to doubt only because of verities that one believes without doubting.
- (2) Knowing begins with an act of faith and this faith precedes doubt. Believing is primary and doubting is secondary.
- (3) The work of modern science rests on faith commitments that cannot be demonstrated by scientific methods (here Polanyi discusses ‘facts’ and ‘values’ and asserts that all facts are interpreted facts).
- (4) Truth and relativism (there is always more truth to be discovered but the knower that affirms only relativism evades serious living).
- (5) Knowing has a subjective and an objective pole. One cannot say simplistically that all knowing is objective and all believing is subjective. One must take responsibility for one’s beliefs. (Newbiggin 1989:19-23)

Newbiggin borrows Polanyian ideas to critique modern culture and then goes on to use Polanyi’s epistemology to reflect on knowing and believing. He appreciates a way out of the impasse of subjectivity and relativism for a responsible knower to make decisions and pursue commitments with, in Polanyi’s phrase, ‘universal intent’

⁸ By ‘fiduciary’ Newbiggin understands Polanyi’s contention that such a framework of knowing eschews the ideal of total objectivity and recognises a knower’s dependence on faith commitments or assumptions. Polanyi’s use of the term ‘fiduciary’ is explained in greater detail below in note 12.

⁹ In 1984 Newbiggin gave the ‘Warfield Lectures’ at Princeton Theological Seminary. These lectures were expanded into a book, *Foolishness to the Greeks—The Gospel and Western Culture*. This work tested ideas that were developed subsequently in Newbiggin’s 1989 volume on gospel and culture.

(Newbigin 1989:50). Newbigin also borrows from Polanyi the notion that ‘knowing any reality is impossible except on the basis of some framework’ (Newbigin 1983:28). Theologian Paul Weston highlights Newbigin’s Polanyian framework as one that links ‘personal commitment,’ ‘objectivity,’ ‘testing’ and ‘publication.’ This framework applies Polanyi’s notion of universal intent and displays three missional perspectives: proclamation, dialogue and the gospel as ‘public truth’ (Weston 2012:173-8).

Newbigin follows Polanyi’s thought by agreeing that ‘knowledge is the exercise of a skill that has to be learned’ (Newbigin 1986:79). Furthermore, Newbigin again depends on Polanyi in claiming that such a skill ‘has to be learned by submitting to the authority of parents, teachers, and learned men and women’ (79). Newbigin appreciates Polanyi’s notion of tacit knowledge and of the manner in which humans attend from tacit particulars to focal patterns by exercising their ‘capacity to recognise a configuration that is made up of many details’ (80).¹⁰ Recognizing significant patterns is a learned skill that requires personal judgment. In Polanyian terms the skill may be described as attending from subsidiary details to a focal whole or pattern by the work of the knower’s integration (81).

In his treatment of mission theology in *The Open Secret* Newbigin declares, ‘A three-cornered relationship is set up between the traditional culture, the “Christianity” of the missionary, and the Bible. The stage is set for a complex and unpredictable evolution both in the culture of the receptor community and in that of the missionary’ (Newbigin 1995:147). Newbigin elaborates on this theme by calling the three corners, ‘the local culture, the ecumenical fellowship representing the witness of Christians from other cultures, and the Scriptures as embodying the given revelation, with its centre and focus in the person of Jesus Christ’ (1995:153). Newbigin connects these themes in a summary statement when he writes,

¹⁰ Newbigin critiques Laplace’s ideal regarding perfect knowledge arguing, ‘for to know the smallest components of an entity is not to know the entity unless we know the pattern and our knowledge of the patterns is much more than can be specified in words’ (Newbigin 1986:80).

Using Polanyi's terminology, I shall suggest that the Christian community is invited to indwell the story, tacitly aware of it as shaping the way we understand, but focally attending to the world we live in so that we are able confidently, though not infallibly, to increase our understanding of it and our ability to cope with it. (Newbigin 1989:38)

Although he does not apply Polanyi's thought to translation per se, Newbigin's understanding of Christian witness, both in terms of a local congregation indwelling its community and the ecumenical fellowship indwelling the world, sets the stage for visualizing a sequence of translation.¹¹

5.3 Understanding the Tacit Dimension

5.3.1 Introduction

In his critique of the Enlightenment's intellectual heritage and the twentieth century move by philosophers to embrace logical positivism, Polanyi put forth what he termed a 'fiduciary framework' for the discovery of knowledge.¹² He set out to show a relationship between the objective and subjective poles of knowing and argued that all knowing functions within such a fiduciary framework. Polanyi cited Augustine's dictum: *nisi crederitis, non intelligitis* (unless you believe, you will not understand),¹³ thus recognizing belief as the source of all knowledge:

¹¹ Newbigin suggests that 'the only hermeneutic of the gospel is a congregation of men and women who believe it and live by it' (1989:227). He reminds his readers that 'Jesus did not write a book but formed a community... [the community] becomes the place where men and women and children find that the gospel gives them the framework of understanding, the "lenses" through which they are able to understand and cope with the world' (227). Newbigin challenges congregations to renounce an introverted perspective and to 'recognise that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society' (1989:233).

¹² By 'fiduciary' Polanyi indicates that such a framework of knowing disavows the ideal of total objectivity and recognises a knower's dependence on faith commitments. He says of his work *Personal Knowledge*: 'the purpose of this book is to show that complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and is in fact a false ideal' (Polanyi 1958:18). At times Polanyi also refers to a 'fiduciary programme' (1958:18, 299). 'Programme' refers to Polanyi's epistemological project and 'framework' refers to a person's epistemology.

¹³ From Augustine's *De libero arbitrio*, 1.4 (also 2.6). '... [Polanyi] was committed to restore the priority of belief even in science: he loved to recall the Augustinian statement, "Unless you believe, you will not understand"' (Torrance gently corrects Polanyi's attribution of the phrase and claims it derives from Clement of Alexandria). See T. F. Torrance, 'Michael Polanyi and the Christian Faith—A Personal Report' *TAD* 27/2:26-33.

Tacit assent and intellectual passions, the sharing of an idiom and a cultural heritage, affiliation to a like-minded community: such are the impulses which shape our vision of the nature of things on which we rely for our mastery of things. No intelligence, however critical or original, can operate outside such a fiduciary framework. (Polanyi 1958:265-6)

Cardinal Dulles took to heart Polanyi's insight that all thought depends in some way on a fiduciary commitment.

It will leap to mind of anyone who has read even a few pages of Polanyi that his doctrine of the fiduciary component in human knowledge has immense significance for theology. According to Polanyi, all acts of comprehensive knowledge either are or depend upon faith, in the sense of a free commitment to that which could conceivably be false. If this thesis is true, theology, as the work of faith seeking understanding, is not an anomaly among the cognitive disciplines. Religious ideas are acquired, developed, tested and reformed by methods at least analogous to those pursued in the natural and social sciences. (Dulles 1984:537)

My own interest in Polanyi's theory of knowledge vis-a-vis Christian mission seeks to connect Polanyian epistemology with mission theology. How does one communicate meaning across cultural divides? How can one discern, in a cross-cultural setting or encounter, that the Christian gospel has been translated fruitfully? What skills must missionaries learn in order to become effective translators? How can these skills be taught from masters to apprentices? Can Polanyi's terms and concepts be utilised fruitfully to describe Christian mission as translation?

Michael Polanyi's multiple notions of discovery, fiduciary frameworks, the tacit component, embodiment, indwelling, apprenticeship, and the society of explorers all promise to yield insights for mapping mission as translation.¹⁴ Newbigin championed Polanyi's category of the fiduciary framework as a more responsible way of thinking about knowing. He also recognised Polanyi's key insight having to do with the structure of tacit knowing.¹⁵ It is this second insight about Polanyi's tacit dimension that has the

¹⁴ By 'embodiment' Polanyi emphasises the view that a knowing person is embodied and that a human being uses the body as well as one's mind to perceive and to know. By 'indwelling' Polanyi refers to personal participation. One may accept a set of presuppositions and thus 'dwell in them even as we do in our own body' (Polanyi 1958:60).

¹⁵ Polanyi gives particular attention to his notion of the tacit dimension in three books: *Personal Knowledge* (1958:69-243), *The Study of Man* (1959:29-30), and *The Tacit Dimension* (1966) and in several essays: 'Knowing and Being' (1961), 'Tacit Knowing: Its Bearing on Some Problems of Philosophy' (1962), 'The Logic of Tacit Inference' (1966), and 'Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading' (1967). The four essays are collected in a volume edited by Marjorie Grene and titled, *Knowing and Being* (1969), and they represent Polanyi's most developed thought about tacit knowing.

potential to guide translators of the Christian gospel in their work of paying attention to various patterns of meaning. I will show how the tacit dimension of personal knowing offers particular insight for detailing fruitful gospel and culture encounters in the work of Christian mission.

Polanyi's path to developing his philosophy of personal knowledge and articulating the structure of tacit knowing began with the notion of discovery. He became interested in the way of scientific discovery as a practicing chemistry researcher. He wondered how scientists discover findings and articulate theories about this observable universe. The choice of a good problem is a necessary starting point. Significant discoveries only come from tackling good problems. In chapter 4 of *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi begins his discussion on 'skills' by claiming that one may understand the scientist's personal participation in knowing by examining the scientist's skills. 'I shall take as my clue for this investigation the well-known fact *that the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are not known as such to the person following them* [emphasis is original]' (Polanyi 1958:49).

The nature of scientific discovery or the practice of an arts discipline cannot be delineated in sufficient detail to be transmitted by prescription according to Polanyi. Such rules or prescriptions do not exist. They belong to the tradition, and the tradition continues as insights are passed from master to apprentice. Polanyi goes on to say that an artist's work or a scientist's discovery effort or a physician's diagnosis of disease all depend upon skills. Similarly, connoisseurship, like skill, depends on example, practice, and apprenticeship (54-5).¹⁶ In all of these realms of practice, discovery depends upon knowledge that largely remains unspecifiable (50-55).

¹⁶ Polanyi cites as examples of connoisseurship: the wine taster, the expert on tea blends, and the medical diagnostician (Polanyi 1958:54). Polanyi's life in Manchester, England, led him to the shipyards where experts graded kinds of cotton, and he observed yet another set of connoisseurs. Cf. Ruel Tyson's account in an audio conversation about Polanyi (Witmer 1999).

Polanyi eventually describes tacit knowing with the aphorism, ‘we know more than we can tell’ (1966b:4). And our articulation fails to keep up with our knowledge because in addition to our focal awareness and explicit knowledge we operate with a ‘subsidiary awareness’ and an implicit knowledge. Torrance explains that Polanyi’s solution to Plato’s problem in the *Meno* lies in what he calls ‘a tacit foreknowledge of yet undiscovered things’. He argues that Polanyi’s tacit dimension or foreknowledge is not ‘some kind of preconception’ or some *a priori* knowledge but is, rather, an intuitive insight, ‘the insight of a mind formed by intuitive contact with reality’. He likens this to the Greek notion of *prolepsis*, ‘a proleptic conception, an anticipatory glimpse, a tenuous and subtle outreach of understanding with a forward thrust in cognition of something quite new’ (Torrance 1984:113-4). Polanyi’s overall scheme of knowing is aptly summarised by Esther Meeks in the following statement: ‘Knowing is the responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality’ (Meeks 2003:13).

5.3.2 Lessons from Phenomenology and Gestalt Psychology

i. Embodiment

In order to learn about the knowing process Polanyi examined aspects of creative imagination that produced discoveries. He found clues from the world of Gestalt psychology and the philosophical school of Phenomenology. Polanyi read Maurice Merleau-Ponty (*Phenomenology of Perception*, 1945) in order to understand the importance of perception and to appreciate the significant role of embodiment for the human knower.¹⁷ In contrast to the Cartesian emphasis on the *cogito* and the notion of a

¹⁷ The Gestalt notion of ‘wholes and parts’ influenced Polanyi’s idea of a person’s subsidiary awareness of particulars. He saw the human body with limbs, eyes, ears and other parts as a paradigmatic example of a whole (body) and particulars (body parts). Furthermore, he understood the person as an embodied agent who relies on a ‘subsidiary awareness of processes within [one’s] own body’ to apprehend one’s environment (Polanyi 1958:57-62). Torrance insists that Polanyi never saw himself as a phenomenalist (Torrance 2000-2001:30).

mind-body dualism, Merleau-Ponty insisted that human personhood is bound up with both mind and body. Polanyi's own position is summed up by the following passage:

The way the body participates in the act of perception can be generalized further to include the bodily roots of all knowledge and thought. Our body is the only assembly of things known almost exclusively by relying on our awareness of them for attending to something else ... Every time we make sense of the world, we rely on our tacit knowledge of impacts made by the world on our body and the complex responses of our body to these impacts. (Polanyi in Grene 1969:147)

Polanyi went on to posit that the use of tools and probes function as extensions to the body of the knowing person. 'We pour ourselves out into them [tools] and assimilate them as parts of our own existence. We accept them existentially by dwelling in them.' (Polanyi 1974:59). Thus the knowing process is one of inference done within the body of a person. Because persons are embodied souls, all knowing, by definition, is embodied knowing.

I have shown how our subsidiary awareness of our body is extended to include a stick, when we feel our way by means of the stick. To use language in speech, reading and writing, is to extend our bodily equipment and become intelligent human beings. We may say that when we learn to use language or a probe, or a tool, and thus make ourselves aware of these things as we are our body, we interiorize these things and *make ourselves dwell in them*. Such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us *interiorizes* our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook. (Polanyi in Grene 1969:148)

Polanyi used the term 'indwelling' and a related word, 'interiorization', to emphasise the human capacity to look from subsidiaries at a focal subject. In the preceding passage Polanyi's references to the use of language in speech or to employing a probe or stick are all examples of indwelling. He stated that it 'is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning' (Polanyi 1966b:18). Polanyi went on to explain, however, that to the extent knowing is an indwelling it can be 'the utilization of a framework for unfolding our understanding in accordance with the indications and standards imposed by the framework' (Polanyi in Grene 1969:134). The idea of indwelling a framework or a category is how I see the missionary moving from

understanding the source to communicating with the receptor in an act of gospel translation.

ii. Gestalt psychology

In his pursuit of the dynamics of the creative imagination, Polanyi discerned a clue in Gestalt psychology. Merleau-Ponty already had posited the primacy of perception. Gestalt theory holds that human knowledge is the integration of certain smaller pieces of perception to form a larger whole. The seeing of bits and pieces became a key influence for Polanyi in noticing that the human proclivity of ‘seeing patterns’ is part of the structure of knowing (1974:vii, 57-9).¹⁸ Polanyi’s epistemological interest in categories and patterns dovetails with his understanding that a metaphor is construed when one imaginatively integrates two disparate elements into a single novel meaning (Begbie 1991:238, Polanyi and Prosch 1975:76). In the previous chapter I cited Ricouer who invokes Aristotle’s classic definition of metaphor as ‘transference’. Polanyi also understands ‘metaphor’ as a means of transferring or disclosing meaning.¹⁹

Polanyi’s ontological premise presupposed a stance of critical realism.²⁰ Like other scientists, for example physicists and chemists, of his era Polanyi assumed a real world to be perceived and studied for the patterns and insights that could be discovered. He declares:

We can account for this capacity of ours to know more than we can tell if we believe in the presence of an external reality with which we can establish contact. This I do. I declare myself committed to the belief in an external reality gradually accessible to knowing, and I regard all true understanding as an intimation of such a reality, which being real, may yet reveal itself to our deepened understanding in an indefinite range of unexpected manifestations.²¹ (Polanyi in Grene 1969:133)

¹⁸ See Gelwick (1977:26-7, 43) and Gill (2000:41-4) for brief discussions of the influence of Gestalt thinking upon Polanyi’s philosophy.

¹⁹ The previous citation of Ricouer is on pp 107-8. I discuss Polanyi and metaphor more extensively, beginning on p. 182.

²⁰ Critical realism is a philosophy of science that is posed as an alternative to positivist empiricism on the one hand and constructivism and postmodernism on the other. This view posits that ‘much of reality exists independently of human consciousness of it; that reality itself is complex, open, and stratified in multiple dimensions or levels’ (Smith 2010:90-8).

²¹ See also Polanyi (1958:299-324).

Polanyi sought to demonstrate that scientific investigation involved more than doing experiments, recording observations, and drawing conclusions. He claimed that the scientist relied upon perceiving phenomena to see or to intuit patterns of previously unknown realities. He believed that scientists can acquire knowledge and understanding through processes of disciplined inquiry, conceptualisation, reflection and collaboration. Polanyi suggested that scientific discovery required the scientist to follow the two steps he described as intuition and imagination. Polanyi defined 'intuition' as 'a skill for guessing with a reasonable chance of guessing right; a skill guided by an innate sensibility to coherence, improved by schooling'. Polanyi defined 'imagination' as 'all thoughts of things that are not yet present—or perhaps never to be present' (Polanyi 1966a:89). 'The first step in the discovery process is the deliberate act of the imagination questing for the hidden reality suggested by the intuition's subsidiary awareness. The second step is in the spontaneous effort of the creative intuition groping toward integration' (1966a:89).

We may say that when we comprehend a particular set of items as parts of a whole, the focus of our attention is shifted from the hitherto uncomprehended particulars to the understanding of their joint meaning. This shift of attention does not make us lose sight of the particulars, since one can see a whole only by seeing its parts, but it changes altogether the manner in which we are aware of the particulars. We become aware of them in terms of the whole on which we have fixed our attention. I shall speak correspondingly of a subsidiary knowledge of such items as distinct from a focal knowledge of the same items. (1966a:29-30)

5.3.3 *The from-to Structure of Tacit Knowing*

i. Two kinds of awareness

In his preface to the second edition of *Personal Knowledge* Polanyi states:

When we are relying on our awareness of something (A) for attending to something else (B), we are subsidiarily aware of A. The thing B to which we are focally attending, is then the meaning of A. The focal object B is always identifiable, while things like A, of which we are subsidiarily aware may be unidentifiable. The two kinds of awareness are mutually exclusive: when we switch our attention to something of which we have hitherto been subsidiarily aware, it loses its previous meaning. (1958:xiii)

Polanyi offered numerous examples of tacit knowing where the knower relies ‘subsidiarily’ on tacit particulars to comprehend a focal pattern or to perform an action where smaller acts are integrated into a larger action. One example has to do with the use of language in the act of reading. A reader relies on subsidiaries such as letters that comprise a word or upon words that make up a sentence in order to read sentences and paragraphs and grasp their meanings. Polanyi writes about reading the correspondence of the day and thinking of passing a letter to his son. Then he has to stop and think about what language was used in the letter and consider whether it was it a language (English) that his son knew well enough to read. Polanyi had grasped the meaning but not paid attention to the tacit particulars of what words were expressed or in what language they were written (1958:186).

Another example Polanyi uses is the act of riding a bicycle. A rider of a bicycle pays attention to following the way of the road and possible obstacles in the path. Additionally, the rider keeps balance and pushes the pedals almost without giving any thought to these subsidiary activities that comprise the riding of a bicycle. If the rider shifts focus and looks down at the rider’s pedalling feet, the bike is apt to steer into an obstacle. A reader attends to reading or a bicyclist to riding a bicycle by assimilating many particulars in support of one focal activity (49-50).

Polanyi categorised the subsidiary elements or nonfocal clues in a perception as either ‘subliminal’ or ‘marginal.’ Subliminal clues refer to aspects of bodily perception such as eye-muscle movements, movements inside bodily organs, or neural traces in the brain. There are also marginal clues that can be described as ‘things one sees out of the corner of an eye.’ A second kind of marginal clue describes what is seen based on past experiences. There must be background knowledge or things remembered ‘at the background of our minds’ that influence what we perceive. Previous integrations of clues—previously achieved meanings also function as subsidiary clues and form the

background for new integrations of clues into focal awareness and focal activity (Polanyi 1974:95-8; Prosch 1986:56-9).

Polanyi sought to express this *from-to* structure of knowing in various ways. Knowing, according to Polanyi, is ‘relying on’ in order to ‘attend to’ a problem or an activity or in order to perceive meaning. He describes ‘two kinds of awareness’ and writes of subsidiary and focal objects of attention, recognising that focal awareness may appear to be at a distance or may be described as the ‘distal’ term. In the case that one relies on what is close or interiorised, this term he calls the ‘proximal.’ The distinction also may be described by the general terms, ‘tacit’ and ‘explicit’.²²

Polanyi refined his understanding of the meaning of tacit knowing in his work given as the Terry Lectures in 1962 at Yale University. The Terry Lectures were edited into book form in 1966 and titled, *The Tacit Dimension*. In this refining work, Polanyi identifies four aspects of the structure of tacit knowing. The functional aspect (1) is characterised by the *from-to* trajectory; one attends from facial features to a human face for example. The bearing of particulars on a total pattern produces the phenomenon of a pattern—this is the ‘phenomenal’ aspect (2) of tacit knowing. The work of interpreting particulars into a meaningful whole as in the use of a probe by a surgeon or dentist yields the ‘semantic’ aspect (3) of tacit knowing. Finally, Polanyi says one can ‘deduce a fourth aspect, which tells us what tacit knowing is a knowledge of.’ This will represent its ‘ontological aspect’ (4) (1966b:10-13, 141).

ii. Mutuality: society of explorers

As he reflected on the process of knowing and the testing of knowledge claims, Polanyi contended that scientists share findings, test hypotheses, and rely on each other to advance scientific knowledge. It is a pursuit of reality that requites mutuality. In his

²² For a detailed discussion of these terms see Gelwick (1977:67) and Scott (1985:52).

work, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi referred to the need for a network or framework or society,

where tacit personal interactions ... make possible the flow of communications, the transmission of social lore from one generation to the other and the maintenance of an articulate consensus ... I have shown also how the same interactions gratify a desire for companionship, a pure conviviality to which a participation in common rituals gives the firmest expression. (1958:212)

Polanyi titled this section of *Personal Knowledge* 'Pure Conviviality' and in *The Tacit Dimension* referred to the fellowship of scientists as 'A Society of Explorers' (1958:203; 1966b:53ff). In describing 'conviviality' Polanyi uses the words 'fellowship' and 'companionship' to refer to the communal experiences of persons. 'Pure conviviality' is the 'cultivation of good fellowship,' where 'many acts of communication' reflect a mutual 'desire for company' (Polanyi 1958:210). A second kind of pure conviviality, Polanyi continues, moves from a sharing of experience to a 'participation in joint activities' (1958:211). Polanyi goes on to describe a picture of society that exhibits a framework of cultural and ritual fellowship; the fellowship reflects four coefficients of societal organizations: (1) sharing of convictions, (2) sharing of a fellowship (3) co-operation, (4) the exercise of authority or coercion (1958:212).

This social setting for tacit knowing reveals Polanyi's concern that scientific knowledge must be validated as part of a wider human culture, including the arts, laws, religions, and languages. One draws conclusions and holds convictions in all fields of inquiry believing them to be true, meaning, that one proclaims or publishes with 'universal intent' of persuading others of one's conclusions. Reflecting on the Soviet Union's propensity to control the outcomes of science for the ideals of the state prompted Polanyi to pursue the meaning of freedom for the scientific community (1946:8).²³ The Communist ideal of a planned state with science harnessed to do the state's bidding led Polanyi to warn of external authority suppressing the truth. Yet

²³ See Scott and Moleski's biography of Polanyi (2005).

scientific pursuits are not free in a careless way because both authority and tradition are vital elements within the free community of science. Polanyi referred to scientific cooperation as coordination of mutual adjustment of independent initiatives, a kind of spontaneous organisation where scientists hear, report, and evaluate other scientists' work. The authority is in the power of the network that builds upon tradition, and the community depends on mutual trust and on a confidence that the members are equally devoted to pursuing truth about reality (Polanyi in Grene 1969:138-142, 165).

iii. Durability of the *from-to* structure

In discussing the *from-to* dynamics of tacit knowing Polanyi observed that a person can make a determination to alter focus and rely on the formerly focal object in order to attend to a particular subsidiary element. Essentially, Polanyi indicated that shifting upon what was being relied and upon what attention was focused in a given instance would change the focal and subsidiary elements. As an example he refers to the experience of playing the piano. A veteran pianist will focus attention on the musical score and not need to look down to see how his or her hands are playing the various white and black keys. If this piano player switches focus to the hands striking the keys, inevitably attention will be taken away from the written music and subsequently lose track of following the musical score.

What happens when such a change in attention focus happens? Is it a simple matter to change what is deemed explicit or focal and what is considered subsidiary or tacit? Polanyi discussed this change in focus in several of his books and essays. On the one hand Polanyi argues that the *from-to* relation is durable. In his earlier work, *Personal Knowledge*, Polanyi reflects on the *from-to* relation in terms of discovery when he writes,

A problem that I once have solved can no longer puzzle me; I cannot guess what I already know. Having made a discovery, I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently. I have crossed a gap, the heuristic gap which lies between problem and discovery. (1974:143)

Yet he also seems to indicate that a seesaw process or pattern of integration, analysis, and reintegration is both possible and fruitful. Polanyi's description of this integration and analysis dynamic from his book, *The Tacit Dimension* follows:

Scrutinize closely the particulars of a comprehensive entity and their meaning is effaced, our conception of the entity is destroyed. Such cases are well known. For example, repeat a word several times, attending carefully to the motion of your tongue and lips, and to the sound you make, and the word will sound hollow and eventually lose its meaning ... Admittedly the destruction can be made good by interiorizing the particulars once more. The word uttered again in its proper context, the pianist's fingers used again with his mind on his music, the features of a physiognomy and the details of a pattern glanced at once more from a distance: they all come to life and recover their meaning and their comprehensive relationship. But it is important to note that this recovery never brings back the original meaning. It may improve on it ... In these cases, the detailing of particulars, which by itself would destroy meaning, serves as a guide to their subsequent integration and thus establishes a more secure and more accurate meaning of them. (1966b:18-20)

Upon further reflection, therefore, Polanyi saw how shifting awareness from focal to subsidiary elements can be an intentional act of discovery. In his essay 'Knowing and Being', Polanyi explores in greater detail the work of identifying the particulars of a comprehensive entity and describing the relation between particulars. He asserts that 'specifiability' remains incomplete in two ways: 'First, there is a residue of particulars left unspecified; and second, even when particulars can be identified, isolation changes their appearance to some extent' (Polanyi in Grene 1969:125).²⁴

Polanyi cites the example of topographic anatomy wherein a scientist can identify the particulars of a comprehensive entity, in this case the human body, 'Yet the physician can understand the mutual relation of all the particulars inside a body only by a sustained effort of the imagination.' Polanyi concludes that any 'complex spatial arrangement of opaque objects is unspecifiable' and that

We can see two complementary efforts aiming at the elucidation of a comprehensive entity. One proceeds from a recognition of a whole towards an identification of its particulars; the other, from the recognition of a group of presumed particulars towards the grasping of their relation in the whole.²⁵ (Polanyi in Grene 1969:125)

²⁴ Polanyi asserts that the tacit is ineffable and that the tacit particulars are unspecifiable. Polanyi reminds continually 'that we know more than we can tell.'

²⁵ Polanyi finds a close parallel between the elucidation of a comprehensive object and the mastering of a skill. The successful analysis of a skilful accomplishment in terms of its constituent actions, for example

Polanyi concludes his analysis of the *from-to* structure in processes of knowing by linking the two kinds of awareness (focal and subsidiary) to paying attention. Particulars may be considered by paying focal attention to them or particulars may be considered subsidiarily by focusing upon the comprehensive whole or pattern that contains them. Consequently, two kinds of meaning can be established: what the particulars mean in themselves and what they mean jointly comprehended as a focal whole. Furthermore, attention may be shifted from particulars to the whole and back again, in a seesaw of analysis and integration.²⁶ Polanyi declares, ‘The process of inductive discovery is in fact an oscillation between movements of analysis and integration in which, on balance, integration predominates’ (1969:130).

In one of his last published pieces exploring the tacit dimension Polanyi refers to the triads of tacit knowledge. He cites the American philosopher Charles Peirce and Peirce’s triadic pattern, ‘A stands for B to C’. Polanyi declares instead: ‘A person A may make the word B mean the object C or else.’ Or, ‘the person A can integrate the word B into a bearing on C’. Polanyi furnishes an example of a lecturer (A) who pointed his finger (B) toward an object (C). The finger then is not seen focally but acts subsidiarily to focus attention on the object in view. Awareness of the pointing finger is called a subsidiary awareness, in this case of the finger. Polanyi says further that it is our subsidiary awareness of a thing that endows it with meaning—a meaning that bears on an object about which we are focally aware. Thus, in general terms, the triad of tacit knowing consists in subsidiary things (B) bearing on a focus (C) because of an integration performed by a person (A) (1969:181-2).

skiing, playing golf, or riding a bicycle, remains always incomplete because of the unspecifiability of all the particulars and the difficulty of grasping the integrated whole.

²⁶ Harry Prosch (1986:211) describes Polanyi’s references to this oscillating thinking between subsidiaries and the focal object as ‘analysis’ and ‘synthesis.’

Polanyi discusses this triadic picture of tacit knowing by introducing the terms 'sense-reading' and 'sense-giving'. Consider a sequence of three integrations. A person reads or understands a situation, an event, or a new experience, such as driving upon an unfamiliar road. Secondly, the person assimilates the experience and seeks to render an account of it in words. Thirdly, the person interprets this verbal account with a view to conveying the experience to another person so as to help the receiver come close to experiencing the same situation. The first two integrations are the work of the translator, but in the third integration another agent enters the paradigm, one who receives the translated or interpreted experience. Polanyi calls the first integration a kind of sense-reading; the second is a sense-giving; and the third is, again, an instance of sense-reading (1969:185-7).

Polanyi's oscillating process of inductive discovery is a method that has potential to yield insights when artfully utilised by missionaries. I am not sure Polanyi ever entirely made up his mind about the usefulness of oscillating between focal and tacit points of reference. He might be critiqued for not describing this more definitively. On the one hand he believed the shift from focal to tacit broke a mental integration. On the other hand, he intuitively sensed that such a back and forth paying of attention happens naturally in many situations. One example is that of a pianist shifting attention from the musical score (focal) to the placement of one's fingers on particular keys (tacit). I definitely see the oscillation process as a key to using one's focal awareness for greater learning. I propose applying this sequence by picturing a missionary-translator or translation team (A) who can translate and present the gospel (B) into a setting where the gospel is brought to bear on a culture, society, and/or people group (C). To follow Polanyi's use of terminology we might say that the missionary first does a sense-reading of the gospel, including paying attention to the cultures of the biblical witness and that of Jesus the Mediator. Secondly, the translator interprets and offers the gospel to others,

an example of sense-giving. Finally, persons belonging to the receptor group or receptor culture consider and receive the gospel message, an example of a subsequent sense-reading.

iv. The tacit dimension and metaphor

Polanyi's brief reflection on metaphor asserts the heuristic power of metaphor for exploring meaning. Polanyi devotes a chapter to the subject in his final book, *Meaning* (1975). 'Words... function as indicators, pointing in a subsidiary way to that focal integration upon which they bear' (Polanyi and Prosch 1975:70). In the chapter on metaphor, Polanyi intriguingly links integration (a term he uses regarding a knower bringing clues together in perception), tacit knowing, and metaphor. He introduces a distinction between two types of semantic meanings: indication and symbolisation. The former has to do with self-centered integrations whereas symbolisations are self-giving integrations. It is the location of intrinsic interest, subsidiary or focal, that supplies the distinction.²⁷ Then Polanyi describes a metaphor as a comparison where both the subsidiary and focal have intrinsic interest. One can analyse a metaphorical integration, although Polanyi warns, 'To reduce a metaphor or poem to its disconnected subsidiaries is to extinguish the vision which linked them to their integrated meaning in a metaphor or a poem' (1975:82).

In one of his early works seeking to describe 'a theology of the arts', Jeremy Begbie reads Polanyi on 'metaphor' and 'art' invoking Polanyi's application of integration. Polanyi appreciates that a metaphor is construed when one imaginatively integrates two disparate elements into a single novel meaning (Begbie 1991:238, Polanyi and Prosch 1975:76). Polanyi sees the concept of metaphor extending beyond language to works of

²⁷²⁷ A self-centred integration is made from the self as a centre, including all the subsidiary clues to which one attends, to the object of our focal attention. Examples might include a person integrating sensory clues to make a perception or someone using a name to designate an object. A self-giving integration or a symbolisation finds the subsidiary clues to be of intrinsic interest and they suggest meanings that carry one away by the meanings. For example one finds meaning in the symbol of a nation's flag or a tombstone. 'It is only by virtue of our surrender to it that this piece of cloth becomes a flaf and therefore becomes a symbol of our country' (1975:71-3).

art.²⁸ He utilises I. A. Richard's terms, frame and story, and sees the frame of a work of art and its story as two subsidiaries integrated into a metaphor that discloses the meaning of a work of art (Begbie 1991:240-43, Polanyi and Prosch 1975:86-8). Begbie endorses the idea that a metaphor is essentially irreducible like a work of art; hence, metaphors are used not just to redescribe but also to disclose for the first time (Soskice 1985:93ff).

Polanyi creatively sought to apply his notion of the tacit to the aesthetic realm—to understanding paintings, poems, stories and religious affirmations. Writing about the apprehension of meaning in a poem, Polanyi comments, 'Something more than the integration of its frame and its story occurs in our grasp of the reality of a poem. The poem takes us out of the diffuse existence of our ordinary life into something clearly beyond this and draws from the great store of our inchoate emotional experiences a circumscribed entity of passionate feelings' (Polanyi & Prosch 1975:88). Using Polanyi's ideas on metaphor for understanding works of art reinforces my conviction that translating the gospel also calls for imaginatively integrating subsidiary elements into a comprehensive mosaic or a patterned picture.

5.3.4 The Tacit Dimension and Critical Interpreters

Marjorie Grene, Polanyi's unofficial tutor in philosophy, in her 1977 essay, 'Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy,' wrote that the notion of the tacit dimension in personal knowing was Polanyi's truly unique and original insight (1977:168). Walter Gulick, book review editor of The Polanyi Society's journal, claims similarly 'that in the long run it is Polanyi's subsidiary-focal distinction and all his work on the tacit dimension which will be recognized as his most creative and enduring legacy to subsequent generations' (Gulick 1991:9).

²⁸ In Polanyi's final book, *Meaning*, one chapter is titled 'From Perception to Metaphor' and three chapters are devoted to ideas about art (Polanyi and Prosch 1975:66-82, 82-108).

As with many seminal ideas, inevitably there are others whose insights build upon the original notion and others who offer alternative views on the same subject.²⁹ American philosopher John Searle, whose early work focused on speech acts, produced a later work, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (1983). Searle defines ‘Intentionality’ as the capacity of minds to be about, to represent, or to stand for, things, properties and states of affairs in the world. Searle also introduces a technical term, ‘*The Background*’, and describes it as ‘the set of nonrepresentational mental capacities that enable all representing to take place—the abilities, capacities, tendencies, and dispositions that humans have and that are not themselves intentional states.’ Thus, when someone asks us to ‘cut the cake’ we know to use a knife and when someone asks us to ‘cut the grass’ we know to use a lawnmower (and not vice versa), even though the actual request did not include this detail (Searle 1983:140-55). Searle sometimes supplements his reference to the *Background* with the concept of *the Network*, one’s network of other beliefs, desires, and other intentional states necessary for any particular intentional state to make sense. Searle’s work functions as a tacit critique of Polanyi although I find Polanyi’s work more insightful because of his emphasis on the unspecifiable steps in moving from tacit to focal knowledge.³⁰

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor refers to Polanyi’s notion of the tacit with his own version of Searle’s same descriptive term of ‘background’.

Engaged agency as I describe it is an agency whose experience is only made intelligible by being placed in the context of the kind of agency it is. Thus our embodiment makes our experience of space as oriented up-down understandable. In this relation the first term, the form of agency (embodiment), stands to the second (our experience), as a context conferring intelligibility. When we find a certain experience intelligible, what we are attending to, explicitly and expressly, is the experience. The context stands as the unexplicated horizon within which—or to vary the image, as

²⁹ Two scholars writing about ways of thinking that call to mind Polanyi’s tacit dimension are psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Jonathan Haidt. Kahneman’s book *Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow* (2011), and Haidt’s work, *The Righteous Mind* (2012), both emphasise the role of the human knower’s intuition.

³⁰ See Walter Gulick 1991:7-10. When Searle refers in *Intentionality* to Polanyi (Searle 1983:150), he seems to mistake the Polanyian notion of the subsidiary for the idea of the unconscious. Gulick comments that Searle is right in his intuition that we dwell in a skill differently than we focus on explicit rules, but his distinction between ‘intentionality’ and ‘the background’ does not have the elegance or clarity of Polanyi’s subsidiary/focal distinction. I concur with this judgement.

the vantage point out of which—this experience can be understood. To use Michael Polanyi's language, it is subsidiary to the focal object of awareness; it is what we are 'attending from' as we attend to the experience.

Now this is the sense in which I want to use the term 'background.' It is that of which I am not simply aware, as I am unaware of what is now happening on the other side of the moon, because it makes intelligible what I am incontestably aware of; at the same time, I am not explicitly or focally aware of it, because that status is already occupied by what is making it intelligible. Another way of stating the first condition, that I am not simply unaware of it, is to say that the background is what I am capable of articulating, that is, what I can bring out of the condition of implicit, unsaid, contextual facilitator—what I can make articulate, in other words. In this activity of articulating, I trade on my familiarity with this background. What I bring out to articulacy is what I 'always knew,' as we might say, or what I had a 'sense' of, even if I didn't 'know' it. We are at a loss exactly what to say here, where we are trying to do justice to our not having been simply unaware. (Taylor 1995:68ff.)

Taylor's description of 'background' resembles Polanyi's thinking more closely than does the understanding articulated by Searle. Taylor aptly emphasises the idea of awareness in his notion of background. Polanyi's concept of 'unspecifiability' and his *from-to* structure of integrating tacit particulars into focal subjects or patterns is, however, a more developed construct than those of either Taylor or Searle.

Rom Harre, an Oxford philosopher and critic friendly to Polanyi's ideas, took issue with aspects of Polanyi's description of the tacit dimension.³¹ I believe Harre is correct in his complaint that Polanyi's use of varying examples in order to describe tacit knowing can be confusing (Harre 1977:172-3). The opportunity for confusion arises from Polanyi's use of various terms to describe the tacit distinction: subsidiary and focal, proximal-distal, *from-to*, and even tacit-explicit. I suggest that the variety exists for at least three reasons. First, Polanyi constantly reflected on tacit knowing and continually developed his thought with minor emendations over time. His numerous public lectures prompted him to refine the ways he thought and spoke about a subject very close to his heart. Secondly, Polanyi believed that the distinction between the subsidiary and focal dimensions of personal knowing truly applied in all knowing. As

³¹ Harre analyses Polanyi's treatment of the tacit dimension and seeks to draw a distinction between tacit perceptual knowledge and tacit theoretical knowledge. He doubts that theories used as grounds for propositional statements function subsidiarily. He sees the connection between theories and propositions as a logical connection rather than conforming to Polanyi's *from-to* schema (Harre 1977:172-7). Harry Prosch claims that he discussed this difference of opinion with Polanyi himself and concludes that Harre and Polanyi worked with different definitions of 'logical' and 'inference' and that these definitional differences explain the divergence of opinions (Prosch 1986:214-15).

Polanyi worked to explicate the tacit dimension in various realms, such as language, perception, and activities like riding a bicycle, swimming, or dentistry, he found new terms helpful and used new illustrations. The proximal-distal terminology, for example, fits Polanyi's thinking about a dentist or a physician using a probe in a certain space.

The ideas of philosophers John Searle, Charles Taylor, and Rom Harre are significant for locating Polanyi's original idea in the tradition of Anglo-American epistemology. A host of Polanyi scholars and enthusiasts have written about the tacit dimension.³² Most of these interpreters seek to explicate Polanyi's ideas for various audiences.³³ Marjorie Grene's article, 'Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy' is the most insightful interpretation to date on Polanyi's tacit dimension (Grene 1977:164-71).

5.4 Nida and Newbigin: Three Languages, Three Cultures

Before applying the Polanyian notion of the tacit dimension to missional translation I now show a picture of how communication involves three cultural poles. The communication theory of Eugene Nida and Lesslie Newbigin's triadic model of gospel-culture engagement provide an insightful picture of the translator's task. In his 1960 study of communication theory and Christian faith (*Message and Mission*), Eugene Nida, linguist and translator, described his three-language model of communication.³⁴ As a translator whose first language was English, Nida delineated the task of the Bible translator as one of recasting a Greek-Hebrew biblical message through another language, such as English or Spanish or German of the translator, and then to a third

³² See articles from *Tradition and Discovery*, the journal of The Polanyi Society (www.missouriwestern.edu/orgs/polanyi/).

³³ Sociologist Harry Collins discusses Polanyi's idea of tacit knowledge (*Tacit and Explicit Knowledge*, 2010) and offers a development of the Polanyian distinction between tacit and explicit knowledge. The Polanyi Society devoted an entire edition (38:1, 2011-2012) of their journal, *Tradition and Discovery*, to evaluating Collins's claims.

³⁴ Nida repeats his outline of this model in later works but without substantial amendments; see Nida (1964:120-150, 1981:20-30). I introduced this model of Nida in chapter three. Cf. sections 3.6 and 3.7.

receptor language. Nida taught generations of Bible translators that translation as a communicative event always takes place within a cultural context. Within that context the translation process includes three moves:

1. The source culture displays or reveals a message (since Scripture is the Bible translator's source, this leads the translator to learn the cultures of the ancient world of Hebrew and Greek thought and language; labelled culture S for source).
2. The translator receives and assimilates the message(s) of this source culture in terms of her own language and culture; thus, this first receptor culture receives this message in its own language before recasting it and sending it elsewhere (labelled culture T for translator). This assimilation of the source's message may have taken place over generations or even centuries.
3. The translator's own culture functions as a secondary source from which the translator or witness offers and sends the translated message to another set of recipients or receptor culture (labelled culture R). (Nida 1960:58-61)

Because a message can only have authentic meaning in terms of a cultural context, Nida advocated that the translator's goal is to achieve 'dynamic equivalence'. In other words, Nida contended 'we want to be sure R is able to respond to S within the context of his own culture in substantially the same manner as T responded to S in the prior communication' (Nida 1960:58-61).

Bible translators and cross-cultural missionaries have spent considerable time and energy investigating the biblical sources and studying various 'foreign mission field' cultures. Nida's model, however, also highlights the need for the missionary or translator to take the additional step of paying attention to the translator's own cultural conditioning. Undoubtedly, the translator has tacit assumptions (unspecifiable biases or emphases) that remain hidden unless somehow they are noticed or exposed. When particularly close attention is focused on where the gospel comes from and where it is going to, it may be natural to pay less attention to the cultural situation where that translator is situated and feels most at home. I believe, however, that Nida's model bids mission practitioners to pay attention equally to three cultures: the biblical source cultures of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek; the translator's culture; and the final receptor culture.

Christian mission should not be reduced to the simple notion of the transmission of a message or a set of ideas, because mission involves communicating not only messages but also practices and ethical norms. Nor can Christian mission properly be construed as only a matter between individuals.³⁵ The gospel represents a community. The Bible is a community book, and a congregation of Christian worshippers may be understood in Newbigin's phrase as 'the hermeneutic of the gospel'. Darrell Guder notes, 'mission as translation means that the apostolic ministry of witness takes place in a plurality of cultural forms. None of them is normative for the others' (Guder 2000:91-2). Guder explains that translation always implies reduction.³⁶ Guder uses 'reduction' first to indicate that gospel witnesses (translators) are frail and forgiven humans that often fail in their efforts. Secondly, he takes a page from textual translation to highlight the problems of one language lacking semantic resources to capture nuances of meaning expressed in another language. Furthermore, the danger is that a certain translation and concomitant reduction will be treated as normative and may exert a controlling influence over other translations.³⁷ If this happens, the reduction becomes a reductionism that fails to appreciate other complementary translations in other cultural contexts (2000:93-103).³⁸ A reductionist understanding of the gospel whether medieval, modern or postmodern can plague the translation/transmission of these messages in any of these triadic dimensions associated with Nida's view.³⁹ The translator, therefore, must learn to pay attention to all three-language perspectives, the respective cultures

³⁵ Guder (2000:115-19) argues that the Enlightenment following the Reformation produced a 'reductionistic focus upon the individual's salvation.' This reduction of the gospel stressed the 'autonomy of human reason and the educability of the human person'.

³⁶ Guder explains, 'The favored way to accomplish this [reduce the person and work of Jesus] over the centuries has been to diminish the historical particularity of Jesus by reducing him to a set of ideas, an intellectual system, often connected with a codified ethic, and managed thematically within the church's rites and celebrations' (Guder 2000:101).

³⁷ Guder follows Bosch's exposition of three fundamental reductionisms that have helped to shape the Western church's mission from the outset. Cf. Guder 2000:104-5.

³⁸ For example, mission in the wake of the Enlightenment tradition, according to Bosch's analysis, suffers from the modern era's radical anthropocentrism as reduction and reductionism. Bosch devotes a chapter to describing the Enlightenment and its ramifications for Christian mission (Bosch 1991:262-362).

³⁹ Guder devotes a chapter on the challenge of reductionism. His formula reads 'reduction + control = reductionism' (2000:97ff).

represented by these language communities, and the possibility of distortion and reductionism.⁴⁰

Mission theologian Lesslie Newbigin also explicated a triadic view of gospel and culture dynamics.⁴¹ George Hunsberger claims that Newbigin's theology manifests a sense of a 'three-cornered relationship' involving the gospel (source), a particular culture (receptor) and the church (witness). Hunsberger appreciates this aspect of Newbigin's thought displayed in a triangular model: the gospel at the apex and culture and church at the base corners, forming the three relationships of gospel-culture, gospel-church, and church-culture. The relationships among these three are described by the formation of three axes. The 'conversion encounter axis' describes what may happen between gospel and culture. The 'reciprocal relationship' axis represents interactions between the gospel and the church. The missionary dialogue axis describes the conversation that ensues between the church and a culture (Hunsberger 1996:3-10).

The gospel-culture encounter takes place in 'the language of the receptor culture', but it is from and toward an 'other' beyond the receptor. This dialogue is the work of the Holy Spirit conveying the presence of God. The second side of the triangular model is the gospel (or Bible)-church relationship. Here the Bible operates as the authority for the church, but it is a challenging and renewing authority as it includes the impact of fresh interpretations expressed by converts from plural cultures in its community. These new members open up and extend the meaning of the scriptures so that the total church is pluriform. In the third part of the triangle, the church-culture relationship, new

⁴⁰ In Chapter Three I discuss Shannon and Weaver's code model of communication. This model has dominated the field of communication theory for a long time. The 'interaction' code model emphasises that communication is a dynamic process whereby human behaviour, both verbal and nonverbal, is perceived and responded to. The 'transaction' code model moves beyond the relationships among source, message (translator), and receptor to focus on the process of creating a meaning where both sender and receptor are interactive participants. The inference model of communication is based on the so-called 'relevance theory' work of Sperber and Wilson, which asserts that communicators must make the intention or ostention of their communication clear in a way that receptors are able to 'infer' what the communicator intends. See Shannon and Weaver (1949), Sperber and Wilson (1995), Hill (2003), and Roberta King (2008:66-75) for discussions of communication models.

⁴¹ See Newbigin (1995:147-53) and (1978:11-12). I appreciate Paul Weston alerting me to these references.

converts and a renewed understanding of the gospel join other Christians in dialogue within the church and in outward dialogue with all other individuals and cultures. In this outward dialogue, Newbigin reminds us that all thinking begins from some faith-decision and that all positions depend upon ultimate axioms, ones that cannot be proved by any other set of axioms that are more ultimate. The result is that a Christian speaks to non-Christians out of a conversion or paradigm shift known and practiced in a community of believers (Hunsberger 1998:237ff; 1996:8-10).

Imagine then a missionary as an ambassador who represents a kingdom whose king has announced and sent good news via ambassadors to all peoples in the personal form of his son, whose life, death, resurrection, ascension, and promised return constitute the key elements of the good news. The ambassadors, having been formed and instructed by indwelling this good news, seek to translate this good news and represent it faithfully to various people groups dwelling in a variety of cultures. The ambassador/missioner's tasks require indwelling of each of three cultures represented in the missionary transaction and such indwelling further necessitates paying attention to tacit particulars in the gospel or biblical revelation culture, in the missionary's own 'first language' culture, and in the receptor culture. The missionary's goal can be described as an adventure of discovery, first in seeking to discover personal meaning from this gospel, then seeking ways and forms for offering this gospel to others in meaningful translation.

5.5 The Tacit Dimension Applied to Mission as Translation

Applying the Polanyian notion of the tacit dimension to missional translation features three dimensions. The first dimension recognises the missionary as originally located outside of a receptor culture and possessing the advantage of seeing cultural particulars in a fresh way as an outsider peering inside. The second and third dimensions refer to

the missionary's work of perceiving and then integrating. The three dimensions for the missionary are as follows:

1. Functions as a tacit observer (understanding)
2. Pays attention to tacit particulars and perceives them as clues for translation (communicating and evaluating)
3. Assembles particulars into focal patterns, working to achieve integration (communicating and evaluating)

The universal elements of the Christian gospel always are displayed in contextual particulars. Good news always comes in a cultural incarnation. I have acknowledged the misleading metaphor of the gospel as a pristine, disembodied kernel existing without the cultural wrapping of the husk. Nonetheless, this gospel can be offered with Polanyian 'universal intent' within a matrix of cultural imbeddedness. When the offer is received and assimilated through 'conversion', the new translation of gospel faith will be expected to resemble its cousins in other times and places. Although academic treatments of culture in the twenty-first century seem to highlight difference, all cultures share many characteristics.⁴² All have histories and languages and all have developed customs for passing stories and rituals to successive generations. The Christian theologian would argue additionally that all peoples share in sin, idolatry, and hubris and need the salvific work of Christ the Redeemer. Moreover, missionaries find themselves functioning in a global world where the increasing use of the Internet, the global use of English, and a homogenized sense of popular culture foster a sense of a macro global culture. Yet, local cultural patterns and practices do not disappear. The

⁴² Kathryn Tanner points out that although human culture is understood as a human universal, the use of the term 'culture' highlights human diversity. All people have culture but they do not have the same one. The 'fact' of culture is common to all; the particular pattern of culture differs among all people groups. Perhaps a post-colonial concern regarding 'cultural imperialism' also accounts for undue attention directed toward emphasising cultural differences. Cf. A. Sen (2006:18-40, 103-20, 120-49), who discusses 'identity', 'culture and captivity', 'multiculturalism and freedom' and global solidarity. Sen reasons that global voices protesting on behalf of the world's poorest peoples give evidence of a sense of global identity and concern about global ethics.

impact of globalisation has heightened the complexity of intercultural communication on multiple levels.

The theory of personal knowing, with its tacit dimension, can help us perceive cultural patterns and highlight such distinctions. Polanyi has taught us that the knowing subject participates in three dimensions of knowing: (1) subsidiary reliance upon clues; (2) ability to pay attention to a subject, a problem, or a focal target; and (3) integrative powers as a person. Again I cite Esther Meeks' summary: 'Knowing is the responsible human struggle to rely on clues to focus on a coherent pattern and submit to its reality' (2003:13). I envision a mission methodology of applying Polanyi's three dimensions of personal knowing to the gospel translation challenge. In this scheme:

1. The 'focal' target or problem is the challenge of translating the gospel.
2. Relying on 'clues' means making use of cultural particulars in all three 'language domains.'
3. 'Integration by a knower' means that a missionary integrates clues in order to see the patterns of the universal gospel displayed or able to be displayed within and throughout various cultures.

Regarding the reliance upon clues, I assert that missionaries must learn to pay attention to subsidiary clues that integrate meaning within all three cultural domains or languages in Nida's three-language model. The three languages or three cultures, according to Nida's model, are the source culture, the receptor's culture, and the translator's culture.

i. 'S' represents the source culture

The translator first encounters the source culture of divine revelation, commits to trusting God revealed in the Christ and learns the essentials of the biblical faith; the translator regards the Christian Bible as canon and as source document. The source is understood more comprehensively as the Word, written and incarnate. The Christian

faith is pre-eminently a faith in the person of Jesus Christ attested in the Christian scriptures and revealed by the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus is attended to as the Word in human flesh or personhood; the word written and received as canon points to this person of Jesus in promise (Hebrew Bible/Old Testament) and in fulfilment (Christian Bible/New Testament). As a follower of Jesus Christ, one indwells the faith and practices on the way to becoming a missionary or gospel translator. The essential ‘knowing and doing’ in the matter of indwelling the source culture includes the practices of hearing and receiving the gospel by conversion. In theological categories this might be called attending to ‘revelation.’

ii. ‘T’ represents the translator’s culture

The translator assimilates this gospel message and turns toward Jesus Christ in his or her own cultural setting. Embracing normative beliefs, practices, and worldview and integrating them into your identity prepares you to pass the gospel on to others. The essential ‘knowing and doing’ elements of indwelling a missionary’s own culture include understanding and recapitulating this gospel in one’s own language, cultural forms and within a community. The gospel imbedded in first-century forms is first translated to the contemporary missionary’s own culture. In pastoral terms this assimilation is called ‘discipleship’ and in theological terms it may be called ‘attending to spiritual and theological formation.’

iii. ‘R’ represents the receptor culture

Finally the missionary’s gaze turns upon a new cultural group to whom this gospel will be offered. The essential ‘knowing and doing’ elements of communicating in this third dimension may be termed ‘translating and transmitting’ the gospel. I reiterate that this gospel is more than a message or a set of beliefs because it also is a set of practices embodied in the lifestyles, ethics, devotional practices, and worldviews of those devoted to Christ and the good news. The notion of culture-indwelling is standard practice for

most missionaries. Polanyi's notion of 'indwelling' applies readily to the necessity of living in and adapting to a culture in order to understand it for missional activities. Because this cross-cultural work occurs in a new target context or receptor culture, it is commonly referred to in missiological circles as 'contextualisation' or 'inculturation.' Concerned to avoid the mistakes of previous generations that sometimes resulted in transmitting a poorly translated version of the gospel, twenty-first-century missionaries tend to give priority attention to learning local culture. This enterprise may be described as 'attending to local theology.'

In Chapter Six, I offer a case study that presents the apostle Paul's handling of the ethical issue of 'eating meat offered to idols' recorded in 1 Corinthians 8-10. The situation includes the associated issue of table fellowship for Christians finding themselves in pagan settings. Applying the three-culture schema in the Corinthian setting looks like the following:

1. The source culture, 'S', is the Old Testament background and knowledge of Jesus' teaching that informs Paul's faith.
2. The missionary's culture, 'T', is Paul's experience as a Jew converted to Christian faith and living in Gentile settings plus his considering the influence of the Jerusalem Council mandate.
3. The receptor culture, 'R', is the local setting in Corinth where dining options are in homes or in pagan temples.

Polanyi's insights offer multiple possible solutions to the challenges of achieving personal knowledge within each cultural group. Knowing the source culture of the Scriptures and the figure of Jesus Christ requires the exercise of faith. Polanyi's fiduciary framework that emphasises commitment and responsible knowing provides a starting point. Of course no one is able to access the biblical 'source culture' in a way that obviates centuries of tradition. Reading the Bible in the twenty-first century may

bring both the well-assured results of biblical scholarship and the history of Christian tradition that may be foreign to cultures with little or no Christian history. The wise missionary appreciates the multiple traditions of biblical readings but realizes that all of them are laden with cultural particularities. Polanyi's appreciation of tradition and authority caution us not to dismiss tradition but to appraise it carefully.

To learn by example is to submit to authority. You follow your master because you trust his manner of doing things even when you cannot analyze an account in detail for its effectiveness. By watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example the apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art including those which are not explicitly known to the master himself. These hidden rules can be assimilated only by a person who surrenders himself to that extent uncritically to the imitation of another. A society which wants to preserve a fund of personal knowledge must submit to tradition. (Polanyi 1974:53)

For a missionary to know one's own culture requires the exercise of humility. Every would-be missionary has assimilated the gospel in terms of one's own culture, including both cultural highlights and weaknesses; cultural baggage accompanies every disciple seeking to do mission. Missional translation always includes 'the continuing conversion of the translators' (Guder 2000:89). How are cultural blind spots corrected? One needs access to additional points of view. Guder explains:

This is perhaps the most profound reason for ecumenical exchange: the continuing mutual conversion of Christian communities in diverse cultures. Every particular's culture translation of the gospel contributes a witness that corrects, expands, and challenges all other forms of witness in the worldwide church. We are experiencing very concrete examples of this powerful spiritual movement when we encounter the base Christian communities of Central and South America, China's house churches, and the indigenous churches of Africa and Asia. (Guder 2000:90)

Polanyi's appreciation of 'conviviality'⁴³ and mutuality underscore a need for every person and every faith community to be accountable to other believers and faith communities. Just as scientists submit their work for testing and criticism, so should faith communities be ready to receive correction and admonition from their sisters and brothers when necessary. Successful discoveries benefit from Polanyi's four coefficients of societal organization; these are the sharing of convictions, fellowship, cooperation,

⁴³ Polanyi's term 'conviviality' is described and explained on p 180. In the conclusion I will apply that word adjectivally to describe my understanding of translation. See section 9.2.

and authority. The good results of discovery must be verified or validated by testing, trust, acceptance, and authority of persons of reputation and standing in the community.

Such a struggle, in which the ardor of discovery is transformed into a craving to convince, is clearly a process of verification in which the act of making sure of one's own claims is coupled with the effort of getting them accepted by others. (Polanyi 1958:170)

But the amount of knowledge which we can justify from evidence directly available to us can never be large. The overwhelming proportion of our factual beliefs continue therefore to be held at second-hand through trusting others, and in the great majority of cases our trust is placed in the authority of comparatively few people of widely acknowledged standing. (208)

Knowing the receptor culture requires the exercise of caution. The missionary should beware of the danger of too much 'distorting' cultural particularity in the new expression or incarnation of the gospel. Andrew Walls argues and I agree that there cannot be too much 'contextualisation' or 'translation' in gospel and culture encounters. The gospel must seep deeper and deeper into every cultural setting. It is possible to pay too little attention paid to the receptor culture and thus achieve too little translation.⁴⁴ At the same time cultural expressions and cultural values that receive the Christian gospel can distort the gospel and need the critique of Scriptural ethics.⁴⁵ This raises the question of what missionaries have meant by the term 'syncretism', the mixture of elements in a religion. J. Kamstra defines syncretism as 'the coexistence of elements foreign to each other within a specific religion, whether or not these elements originate in other religions or in social structures' (Gort et al 1989:10). The gospel adapts to cultures and at the same time critiques them with transcendent values. As the scientist would insist, boundary conditions do exist. A missionary translates the gospel into the particular context of a receptor culture but expresses the catholic convictions of the

⁴⁴ For example W. R. Hutchinson reports on Royal Wilder's approach that assumed the triumph of Western civilization and preferred 'exporting a Gospel-centered civilization' rather than a the power of a 'pure Gospel' (Hutchinson 1987:99, 115).

⁴⁵ Hutchinson cites James Dennis and Robert Speer who supported socially oriented missions that, 'stood against the slave trade, abolished cannibalism and human sacrifice and cruelty, organized famine relief. Founded leper asylums and colonies, promoted cleanliness and sanitation and checked war' (Hutchinson 1987:107-8).

translated gospel by holding onto the Polanyian notion of universal intent. Particularity exists side by side with catholicity.

The twenty-first century emphasis on cultural contexts and local particularities, however, may inhibit missionaries from keeping the big picture in view. If the ‘big picture’ is comprehensive enough, it will be so because of reliance on a sufficient number of tacit coefficients and an integration of such coefficients into a meaningful pattern. Learning to rely on ‘more’ particulars allows such a big picture to expand—to see and to submit to a wider, deeper, and broader swath of reality.

5.6 Conclusion

Polanyi himself summarised his work on the tacit dimension as follows:

We have reached our main conclusions. Tacit knowing is shown to account (1) for a valid knowledge of a problem, (2) for the (scientist’s) capacity to pursue it, guided by his sense of approaching solution, and (3) for a valid anticipation of the yet indeterminate implications of the discovery arrived at the end. (1966b:24)

I have employed insights gleaned from Polanyi’s notions of discovery, indwelling and tacit knowing so as to apply them to the missionary’s work of translating the Christian gospel into new cultures and contexts. I have utilised a triadic view of communication articulated by Bible translator Eugene Nida that dovetails with Lesslie Newbigin’s theological view of culture, gospel and witness. The missionary’s work can be described in this triadic form as follows: the missionary apprehends the gospel in its source culture and assimilates and critiques the missionary’s own view of the gospel in one’s own culture while working to offer the gospel to people in a receptor culture. The missional translation sequence can be described symbolically as: a missionary-translator or translation team (A) who can translate and present the gospel (B) into a culture setting where the gospel is brought to bear on a culture, society, or people group (C). This work

of missional translation will involve discerning and understanding patterns of gospel-inserted-into cultures.

Although I derive helpful insights from Polanyi's tacit knowing schema, I acknowledge limits in his hermeneutical framework as I relate it to missional theology. The missionary is engaged in communicating beliefs and practices associated with the transcendent God of the Bible. Although sympathetic to Christian themes, Polanyi resisted any explicit role for Christian doctrine in his theory of knowing. Polanyi affirmed an openness to a hidden reality in questing for knowledge but did not ground his knowing in Christian revelation or the Person of Christ. This does not preclude the possibility that Polanyi's understanding was informed tacitly by divine revelation.⁴⁶

I argue that Polanyi's tacit dimension offers missionaries a tool for understanding, communicating and evaluating both explicit and tacit elements within gospel-in-culture patterns. Translation work bids the missionary to pay attention to focal objects and subsidiary particulars in a constant process of integration. In the following three chapters I present case studies describing how the work of missional translation unfolds and continues.

⁴⁶ Polanyi's personal faith is a topic debated by Polanyi scholars. See Gelwick 2008:7-20. T. F. Torrance shared his opinion with me in a 2002 phone conversation that Polanyi had strong Christian sensibilities. See Rae's 2012 volume, *Critical Conversations: Michael Polanyi and Christian Theology*.

CHAPTER SIX

1 Corinthians 8-10 Case Study

6.0 Introduction to Case Studies

The Christian gospel is the announcement of good news regarding what God has done in offering the person and work of Jesus Christ to the world.¹ Because the peoples of the world are separated by geography, culture, language, and custom, the Christian gospel-in-mission must be translated and transmitted by witnesses (a missionary, missionary team, or other messenger) in order to offer it to an unreached receptor person or group of persons. The concept of *missio Dei* captures the emphasis that all mission is God's mission, yet understands that God often calls witnesses to be the agents of 'good news'.² The three poles of translation are source, witness, and receptor.

In each of the following case studies I will present an episode of translation that focuses on beliefs, practices, or worldview. I will employ a Polanyian framework to discover 'translated gospel patterns' discerned in each case study. Polanyi's terms and categories also serve in the constructive work to evaluate mission efforts. This construct of mission understood as translation will be brought to bear on (1) a Pauline discussion in 1 Corinthians 8-10 about practices related to eating food that represents a translation of beliefs and practices from a first-century Jewish Christian background to the first-century Gentile Christian setting; (2) a historical presentation of the gospel emphasis on Christ and his cross in Northumbria during the eighth-century Anglo-Saxon era; and (3)

¹ The gospel includes salient beliefs about God, Jesus Christ and the Kingdom, the Holy Spirit, the Church, salvation, and discipleship. This gospel refers to individual and communal practices such as prayer, worship, Bible reading, the Christian sacraments, and other devotional, fellowship, and ethical practices. Furthermore, the Christian gospel functions as a source for building a worldview for persons who become disciples; the gospel is a lens or a way of looking at the world and understanding life from a distinctly Christian perspective.

² Hebrews 1:1-2 indicates that God has spoken through messengers and his Son; Acts 1:8 emphasises the role of witnesses empowered by the Holy Spirit.

an evaluation of a contemporary effort in story and film to present the Christian gospel through mission and dialogue to persons of Arabic and Muslim backgrounds.

6.1 An Introduction to a Gospel Picture from the New Testament

In this case study I argue that Paul's discussion about food sacrificed to idols represents his apostolic translation of ethical Christian practices related to freedom, dining, pagan temples, and Christian fellowship. Invoking the Polanyian insight of the tacit dimension, I contend that Paul translates *from* precedent practices articulated in the Hebrew Bible and the Apostolic Decree issued at the Jerusalem Council *to* the Gentile setting in first-century Corinth. I will show how Paul demonstrates both continuity and discontinuity with Old Testament antecedents and earlier practices.

The New Testament canon includes 13 epistles attributed to the apostle Paul. These letters begin with the word or name 'Paul' complying with the conventions of first-century letter writing. The canonical list includes two letters to the church at Corinth; 1 and 2 Corinthians are among the seven letters that an overwhelming majority of scholars agree are authentically Pauline.³

Corinth, originally a prosperous Greek city, was conquered and destroyed by Rome in 146 BCE. It was refounded as a Roman city in 44 CE by Julius Caesar and rose again to prominence. In Paul's day it had become the capital of the province of Achaia and the seat of the governor.⁴ Roman Corinth was prosperous and diverse religiously, socially, and economically. Like any ancient pagan city, Corinth's pagan temples and sexual

³ The other consensus 'authentic' Pauline letters are Romans, Galatians, Philemon, Philippians, and 1 Thessalonians.

⁴ The ancient geographer, Strabo, pointed out the strategic setting of the city on a narrow neck of land (isthmus) connecting northern and southern Greece and the Aegean and Ionian seas from east to west. The distance between the two bodies of water is nine kilometres. A paved road, the *diakolos*, enabled boats to be dragged this short haul so that they could avoid the longer and more dangerous voyage around Cape Malea (Ciampa and Rosner 2010:2).

immorality attracted the wary attention of Jews and Christians. The city was known for its biennial Isthmian Games, second in prominence only to the Olympic Games. These games were moved from Corinth proper to the nearby site of Isthmia between 20 and 50 CE. The president of the games hosted annual civic dinners for Roman citizens of Corinth. The reference in 1 Corinthians 8:9 to *exousia* ('the right' to eat in the idol temple claimed by some Roman citizens of Corinth) may have been linked to these Isthmian Games (Winter 2001:4-6).

Paul arrived in Corinth during his second missionary journey and stayed 18 months, teaching and building the community (Acts 18:1-18; 1 Corinthians 1:2). He wrote 1 Corinthians in 53 or 54 CE and sent it from Ephesus. In 1 Corinthians he mentions a previous letter (1 Corinthians 5:9-11) he had written to the Corinthians. Commentators have surmised that the Corinthians misunderstood Paul's earlier warnings about conforming to certain worldly practices. So in the letter known as 1 Corinthians Paul sends more advice and attempts to offer clearer guidance.⁵

The occasion for 1 Corinthians evidently is a letter Paul had received from the Corinthians: 'Now concerning the matters about which you wrote' (1 Corinthians 7:1). Several other '*peri*' (about, concerning) construction sentences identify additional issues to which Paul responds. Furthermore, 1 Corinthians 1:11 refers to a report brought to him by Chloe's people, which reads 'For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters.' Undoubtedly, the letter deliverers, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus, brought an additional oral report to Paul (1 Corinthians 16:17; 5:1). In the letter known as 1 Corinthians the apostle responds to the questions raised and the assertions made by the Corinthians as well as to information that has been reported to the apostle. Paul writes from a background of

⁵ On dating 1 Corinthians, see Thiselton (2000:29-32).

mission experience that he has gleaned from visits to numerous communities and from his personal visit to Corinth.⁶

The first issue addressed by Paul (7:1ff) has to do with questions about marriage. The next issue raised by the Corinthians is cited in 8:1ff. Paul addresses these questions about food and dining and related issues in an extended essay (1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1). The question about the propriety of eating food associated with pagan temples may have been one of the questions debated at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). 1 Corinthians 8:1-11:1 presents a long and complicated argument by the apostle. Three food and dining issues overlap in the course of Paul's argument. Another related issue addressed by Paul has to do with relationships among Christian believers as they exercise freedom and show love to one another (chapters 11, 12, 13 and 14).

6.2 The Issues Addressed by Paul

The larger theme is treated in Anthony Thiselton's commentary as 'Questions about Meat Associated with Idols and the Priority of Love over Rights' (2000:ix). The primary issues Paul addresses are identified as what kind of food may be eaten, where such food may be procured and eaten, and how the community of Christians answers such questions when in disagreement about possible answers.

The first issue stems from some persons in Corinth's Christian community who were arguing for the right to attend the meals in the pagan temples. No restaurants existed in Corinth or elsewhere in the Greco-Roman world. Meals eaten out, involving more than two or three families, occurred in these pagan temples. Meals did not necessarily feature overt worship; these places functioned as community gathering places for sharing meals and conversation and sometimes after-dinner entertainment. Special festivals along with

⁶ See Ciampa and Rosner (2010:3-4).

cultic sacrifices occurred in the temples as well. Numerous first-century papyri invitations regarding festivals follow a common formula.⁷

Since there was not always overt worship as such at the temples, and since Paul was known to eat ‘this food’ when sold in the marketplace, some members of the Corinthian church followed Paul’s example and extended the freedom to not only decide what was eaten but where it could be eaten. The first issue, therefore, was not simply the matter of eating marketplace food that had been sacrificed in the temple (1 Corinthians 8:10), but featured some Corinthian believers pressing the case for eating this food in ‘an idol’s temple.’ The extended section, 10:1-22, details Paul’s express prohibition of eating sacrificial food at the pagan temples in the presence of demons associated with the idols.

Secondly, some of the leftover food from the temple meals was sold in the marketplace. Paul treats this related issue of eating marketplace food in 10:23-11:1. Eating such food was not permitted per Jewish law. In fact the Jewish community had sought and obtained permission from the emperor to butcher meat separately from the meat sacrificed and butchered by the pagan temple priests. Since the Jews expressly forbade eating any marketplace food, what did this mean for Christians? Could Gentile Christians eat such food freely?⁸

The third issue involved Paul’s own attitude to this food. Paul personally seems not at all concerned with the propriety of eating food sold in the marketplace. The specific kind of food being discussed is meat, considered a rare treat for most people in the first century and enjoyed only on certain occasions. Meat is seen in a different light in twenty-first-century European and American cultures. Paul viewed the matter of eating certain foods as an issue of *adiaphora* (those things not forbidden by being in Christ).

⁷ See Fee (1980:184), Witherington (1995:188), and Cheung (1999:35-8) on the social significance of meals in Greco-Roman society.

⁸ See background information on food issues in Bailey 2011:233, Fotopoulos 2003:241-6 and Hays 1997:175-80. See Cheung (1999) for additional information.

Paul did forbid, however, the habit of going to pagan temples and eating meat in that place. He agrees with the Corinthian claim that idols do not exist but, nonetheless, he has concerns about eating in the pagan temples.

Finally, Paul is concerned how Christians exercise their freedom when matters of conscience divide various members of a Christian community. Do ‘the weak’ conform to what ‘the strong’ believe? Do the strong acquiesce to the concerns of the weak? What rules or principles guide ethical practices for Christians living among pagans in a pluralistic context? What does *agape* (love) have to do with *gnosis* (knowledge)? Paul inserted into this discussion of freedom and rights a vigorous assertion of his own apostolic rights and his decision not to insist upon them.

6.3 Paul’s Argument in 1 Corinthians 8-10

A number of scholars have studied 1 Corinthians with both an eye on rhetorical analysis and a concern about the style and format of ancient letters.⁹ Paul was the product of three cultural backgrounds and rhetorical elements from all three cultures are present in his method of argument.¹⁰ The careful reader must balance regard for forms of argument used in the ancient world, Paul’s epistolary style, and the situation in Corinth that occasioned Paul’s letter. Rhetorical analysis is helpful to understand Paul’s arguments, but is best used with a light touch.

Margaret M. Mitchell (*Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 1991) and Ben Witherington III (*Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 1995) both argue that Paul uses a ‘deliberative’ rhetoric in 1 Corinthians. Mitchell says that the letter is a unified document ‘urging concord’. She identifies 1:10 as the *prohesis*, or thesis statement, of

⁹ See Mitchell (1991) and Witherington III (1995) for rhetorical analysis of Paul’s writings.

¹⁰ First, Paul was a Roman citizen like his parents before him. Secondly, he was born and raised in Tarsus of Asia Minor, a city of Hellenistic culture. Finally, Paul was trained in orthodox Jewish law and religion. He was a Pharisee tutored by the notable teacher Gamaliel.

the epistle. The section comprised by chapters 8-10 is the second of four series of proofs offered to support the thesis. Witherington finds a semi-forensic cast in chapter 9 in which Paul asserts or defends his apostolic rights. Kenneth E. Bailey, on the other hand, discerns that in the Corinthian correspondence Paul uses a Hebrew prophetic-homily style akin to Amos and Isaiah (*Paul through Mediterranean Eyes*, 2011). I consider Paul's rhetorical practices a tacit particular in Polanyian terms that sheds light on how Paul translates the ethics of the Christian gospel for Corinthians regarding their table fellowship. I agree with both Mitchell's evaluation and Witherington's description of Paul's rhetorical argument.

The following outline of Paul's argument agrees with several notable commentators (Fee 1987:22-3; Hays 1997:135; Nash 2009:236). The four sections, however, follow subjects rather than rhetorical divisions:

- | | |
|---|--------------|
| 1. The Basis of Christian Conduct: Love not Knowledge | (8:1-13) |
| 2. Paul's Apostolic Discussion of Rights | (9:1-27) |
| 3. Conclusion: Warning about Going to the Temples | (10:1-22) |
| The Example of Israel | (10:1-5) |
| Warning against Idolatry | (10:6-13) |
| The Prohibition and its Basis | (10:14-22) |
| 4. Freedom and the Eating of Marketplace Food | (10:23-11:1) |

6.3.1 *Love Not Knowledge (8:1-13)*

Paul begins this argument citing the Corinthians' assertion that 'all of us possess knowledge.' Paul responds with his own assertion: 'knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.' Certain Corinthian persons are appealing to their *gnosis* (enlightenment) that there is only one God and that pagan deities are lifeless statues (4-6). Furthermore, they know and may have heard from Paul that food is insignificant spiritually (8). These 'strong' or

enlightened Christians think that they are demonstrating their maturity and freedom. The strong may be arguing that the less knowledgeable Christians, the ‘weak’, need to be ushered into a similar kind of maturity and freedom.

Paul refuses to side with the so-called strong and critiques the ‘knowledge’ standard with the love standard. Earlier Paul warned these Corinthians about being puffed up (4:6; 4:18-19; 5:2). In 8:1 Paul explains the danger that *gnosis* can lead to arrogance. Paul is not contending in this letter against the heresy of Gnosticism but against a kind of spiritual elitism that may have marked certain prosperous Corinthians. Paul insists that what is necessary is an attitude of love that guides one to regard brothers and sisters with compassion. He urges the strong Corinthians not to abuse their liberty so as to become a stumbling block for those whose consciences are weak (7-10).

6.3.2 *Paul and Rights (9:1-27)*

Paul’s conclusion in 8:13 offers his resolve never to eat meat if such eating might cause another believer to fall. The stated resolve helps the reader see chapter 9 as more than a digression. For in chapter 9 Paul takes up the issue of his rights as an apostle, but then concludes this section by stating that he is giving up those rights. The argument in 9:1-27 is an indirect one that invokes the issue of his financial support in order to use it to make a point about the larger issue dealing with food and idols.

In 9:1-14 Paul asserts his freedom as he anticipates objections to what may seem a strange stance of giving up personal rights for the greater good. Paul had adopted the practice of supporting himself by making tents (1 Thessalonians 2:5-10; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9), although his income was supplemented by occasional gifts from friends and churches (Philippians 4:10-20; 2 Corinthians 11:9b). In 9:15-23 Paul renounces those apostolic rights. Paul will not accept Corinthian support because he works voluntarily as an apostle (15). Gordon Fee captures the spirit of Paul’s

declaration: ‘In offering the “free” gospel “free of charge”, his ministry becomes a living paradigm of the gospel itself’ (1987:421).

The argument is expanded in verses 19-23 as Paul indicates that everything he does is directed at winning as many people as possible to the gospel. He adopts the motto of ‘I have become all things to all people so that by all means I might win some’ (22b). In the final section of chapter 9 Paul exhorts the Corinthians to embrace the training and discipline of an athlete.¹¹ The self-discipline in view is something the strong Corinthians need for the sake of the gospel. They need it to please the God of the gospel and for the sake of others in the community.

6.3.3 Warnings about Idolatry (10:1-22)

The letter Paul received appealed to him to support the ‘freedom’ contentions of the strong Corinthians, who habitually attended meals in the idol temples. In chapter 8 Paul’s response expressed concern for the ‘weak’ Corinthians. In chapter 9 Paul’s defence of his rights summons the strong Corinthians to follow his example of setting aside their rights. In the concluding chapter of this long argument Paul presents several warnings. In 10:1-22 Paul returns to the issue of the idolatry in the pagan temples. He gives reason for the prohibition against eating in these temples—the idols are the places of demons. This reflects an Old Testament view. The danger is that the idol temples are the habitation of satanic forces or demons. By dining in these temples the strong Corinthian believers are putting Christ to the test (9) and provoking the Lord to jealousy (22).

In the first subsection Paul presents an example from Israel’s history in the wilderness (10:1-6). The God and Father of Jesus Christ is the God of Israel. He is a jealous God who condemns idol-worship and the evils that attend the places where

¹¹ Paul likely is borrowing familiar images from the Isthmian Games.

demons are present. Paul warns the Corinthians using the example of the judgment and punishment of Israel during their sojourn in the wilderness. Paul cites passages from Exodus 32 and Numbers 14, Numbers 21, and Numbers 25. The Corinthian Christians enjoy blessings similar to those of Israel but through their idolatrous practices stand in danger of incurring similar judgment and punishment. Paul, either tacitly or explicitly, is thinking of the Hebrew Scriptures as a source for his ethical reasoning.

The next subsection (10:7-13) warns the Corinthians four times in light of Israel's punishment; in the warning Paul quotes Exodus 32:6, a verse that associates idolatry with revelry and sexual immorality.¹² Fee explains that the word 'play' or 'revel' in the Septuagint refers to cultic dancing but can carry overtones of sexual play (Fee 1987:454). Eating in the presence of idols and sexual play are associated in Numbers 25:1-3.¹³ Revelation 2:14 also condemns these two sins and alludes to Numbers 24 and 25. In verses 1-13 Paul warns that Israel's *eidololatria* (idolatry) and *porneia* (sexual immorality) caused their downfall, despite their sacraments. The citing of Exodus 32:6b in 1 Corinthians 10:7b reinforces Paul's warning that those who have knowledge that idols are nothing (8:1-6) must not lead those who lack this knowledge into idolatry and judgement (Heil 2005:156-9).

The third subsection, 10:14-22, contains the central prohibition about eating *eidolothyta*.¹⁴ In verse 14 he warns the Corinthians to flee the *eidololatria*, the worship of idols associated with eating at pagan temples. Paul's treatment of the question of eating and idols gives no credence to the reality of idols. Paul has agreed with the

¹² 10:7b reads, 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play.' This sentence in its original setting follows the narration of the sacrifices made to Aaron's golden calf described in Exodus 32:1-6.

¹³ Heil explains that Paul has conflated "three thousand" from Exodus 32:28b with the "twenty thousand" from Numbers 25:9 to arrive at "twenty-three thousand" as a tally of those who died in the wilderness. Cf 1 Corinthians 10:8 (Heil 2005:154).

¹⁴ Thiselton discusses the nuances of two differing English translations of *eidolothyta*; 'food offered to idols' and 'food sacrificed to idols' (2000:617-18).

Corinthian assertion that idols do not exist (8:4). But the apostle sees another danger in the spiritual reality underlying the place and practice of idol-worship.

Fee argues that Paul's prohibition is twofold. Paul understands that a sacred meal is an actual participation in the cult and implies fellowship with the cult's deity. Secondly, Paul knows from his Old Testament roots that idolatry invites the presence of demons. Deuteronomy 32:17 (The Song of Moses) and Psalm 106:36-37 both make reference to 'sacrifices to demons'. For Paul, the demonic powers are real and dangerous beings. Despite Christ's victory over them (Colossians 2:15; Ephesians 1:20-21) they still are working (2 Corinthians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; Ephesians 6:12) until defeated in the *eschaton* (final age) (1 Corinthians 15:24). Therefore eating in the presence of demons is incompatible with the Christian life, and table fellowship with Christ at his meal is incongruous alongside other experiences of fellowship with demons.¹⁵

6.3.4 Freedom, Marketplace Food, and God's Glory (10:23-11:1)

Finally, in 10:23-11:1 Paul concludes the long argument by distinguishing between *hierathyton* (marketplace food) and *eidolothyton* (idol food) as such. A Christian, according to Paul, is free to eat marketplace food at home or in a neighbour's home because 'The earth and its fullness belong to the Lord' (Psalm 104). At the same time a Christian is free 'not to eat' if eating 'offends' a Christian brother or sister (28). Paul does not allow another person's 'conscience' to judge his 'conscience.'¹⁶ Yet finally Paul affirms that the practices of eating and drinking or refraining from food and drink ultimately hinge on what action will bring glory to God (31). Paul's freedom is not determined by the scruples of another person, but Paul's freedom is exercised on the

¹⁵ See Cheung for helpful background material about idol food in early Judaism and in the early Christian period (1999).

¹⁶ The term *syneidesis* is often translated 'conscience' but according to Hays (1997:177-8) it refers rather to an individual's level of self-awareness or moral confidence. The term occurs five times in 10:25-29.

basis of determining what builds up ‘the other’ person (23-24) and what glorifies God (31).

6.4 Analysis

An older and more traditional reading of these chapters sees Paul responding to an internal conflict in Corinth between ‘weak’ believers and ‘strong’ believers over the question of marketplace food.¹⁷ I concur that divisions existed among the Corinthian believers. Paul says as much in 1:11-13, in which he refers sarcastically to parties belonging to Paul, Apollos, and Cephas and in 11:17-22, where he criticises various persons eating and drinking the Lord’s Supper without regard for each other. Witherington agrees with Theissen that those ‘in the know’ who argued for the right to eat idol meat likely were the well-to-do and socially enlightened male members of the *ecclesia* and regularly had occasion to eat at the temple dinner parties (Witherington 1995:195). Such divisions and factions, however, belong in the background of 1 Corinthians 8-10. Fee correctly posits that Paul’s vigorous and assertive response to the Corinthians indicates that more was at stake than an internal division. Two clues suggest another interpretation: both 8:10 and 10:1-22 can be seen as referring to the same basic problem about dining. Paul uses the word *eidolotyta* to refer to sacrificial food eaten at the cultic meals in pagan temples whereas the term *hierathyta* is a more general term referring to food sold in the marketplace. The issue turns on where the food is eaten rather than how the meat is butchered and prepared.¹⁸

Because the temples dedicated to idols are seen by Paul to be the habitation of demons, the practice in question is a theological one. Because some Corinthian

¹⁷ See works on 1 Corinthians by Barrett, Murphy-O’Connor, and Theissen regarding the conflict in Corinth.

¹⁸ See Witherington (1993: 239-41, 246-51) and Fee (1980:181-91).

individuals are asserting their freedom to eat both *hierathyta* and *eidolotyta* over against the *syndesis* (conscience) of other members of the community, the question also is an ethical one. Thus, Paul's prohibition against eating becomes a warning about avoiding idolatry and a plea for *agape* over *gnosis*.

The argument in chapter 9 may be read as a defence of Paul's apostolic authority or as a reassertion of Paul's apostolic rights coupled with his decision to forgo insisting on those rights. Is Paul defending himself in order to demonstrate that his advice has authority and should be heeded? This is the position of Fee (1987:362, 393-4). The exchange of letters suggests the Corinthians either may have misunderstood Paul's teaching or may disagree how to apply some of the teaching—or they simply disagree with his advice.

I agree with John Fotopoulos that the *apologia* in chapter 9 is not aimed primarily at Corinthian questions over his apostolic authority (2003:19). Rather, Paul's apparent digression (9:1-27) is intended to establish that he is an apostle with apostolic rights and freedoms that he can set aside for the common good (Mitchell 1991:243-250). Paul can become weak for the sake of the gospel and on behalf of the weak. Paul's concluding injunction in 11:1, 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ', emphasises Paul's own attitude to a proper use of freedom.

Paul issues two prohibitions in 10:14-22 and 10:23-11:1. Kenneth Bailey reads 1 Corinthians as a series of five essays or homilies that Paul has crafted in a prophetic rhetorical style reminiscent of material in Isaiah. He asserts that Paul frequently uses ring composition, a style that usually places the climax in the centre, not at the end of the argument (Bailey 2011:33-53). He finds this ring composition featured in the sections of chapter 10 containing the prohibitions. Thus the climax of 10:14-22 is in a middle subsection, what Bailey terms cameo four of seven, and consists of verses 19-20.

¹⁹What do I imply then? That food sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be partners with demons.

Similarly, the climax of 10:23-11:1 he identifies as cameo four of the eight cameos with the climax set in the middle and corresponding to verses 28-29. Verses 28-29 are the centre ('C') of a chiasmus pattern (A-B-C-B-A).

²⁸But if someone says to you, 'This has been offered in sacrifice', then do not eat it, out of consideration for the one who informed you, and for the sake of conscience—²⁹I mean the other's conscience, not your own. For why should my liberty be subject to the judgement of someone else's conscience?

Bailey's literary analysis helps us to find the climax and thus the apostle's points of emphasis in these two middle paragraphs. Literary style here functions as a tacit clue that leads the careful reader to understand Paul's emphasis. In the first paragraph the reader is enjoined not to eat in the presence of demons. In the second paragraph the reader is instructed to set aside the right to eat in deference to another's conscience.

Paul answers two further questions about food and dining. Yes, Paul says, meat can be bought in the marketplace and eaten at home. 10:25 reads, 'Eat whatever is sold in the meat market.' What about the situation in which a Christian is invited to a dinner party in the home of an unbelieving friend? Paul writes, echoing Jesus (Luke 10:8), 'Eat whatever is set before you.' But if someone tells you this is 'idol meat' then one should refrain from eating out of loving concern for the conscientious informant.

So Paul's advice is both negative and positive regarding the eating of meat that was butchered and sacrificed in pagan temples. *Hierathyta* (marketplace food) belongs to the realm of freedom except when another's scruples must be considered. Eating *eidolothyta* (idol food), however, always is prohibited because it involves dining in the pagan temples where demons are present. Paul has responded to the questions raised by the Corinthians by turning to the larger issue of a Christian's responsible use of freedom. He does champion freedom but it is freedom in Christ, a freedom aimed to

glorify God. This means that the follower of Christ examines a potential action or practice in terms of what will honour God and what will benefit the community, including a regard for those who are considered weak because of scruples.

6.5 Paul's Advice in Light of Translation Motifs and Polanyian Insights

In the conclusion of chapter four, I summarised six missional elements or translation motifs discovered in the combined corpus of Walls, Sanneh, and Bediako.¹⁹ These motifs inform the processes of gospel transmission. Paying attention to three of these motifs can help one understand Paul's treatment of 'food sacrificed to idols' as a fruitful translation of ethical practices in a mission setting. In particular Paul adapts Old Testament principles for a New Testament church community. The three motifs are: (1) the understanding of conversion as a turning away from old ways and toward Christ; (2) the congruence between source and receptor gospel patterns as reflecting a 'family resemblance' of the gospel; and (3) Christian identity as an appropriate connection between one's past and one's new situation of being 'in Christ'.

Polanyian insights guide me to point out that Paul was able to function as a tacit observer because of his multicultural background. I will identify tacit particulars Paul employs in translating biblical practices for the converted Gentiles. In the work of identifying those particular elements I will rely on the *from-to* trajectory of tacit knowing in evaluating how Paul moves from Hebrew Bible principles to Christian

¹⁹ The list includes: 1. Jesus' incarnation seen as paradigmatic translation (Walls 1996:26); 2. 'Conversion' understood as turning toward Christ (Walls 1996:29); 3. Christianity (translated) stimulates the vernacular. (Sanneh 1989:52-3); 4. Christian identity always belongs at the heart of gospel and culture issues in the conversion situation (Bediako 1992:136ff); 5. A role exists for primal elements; the convert uses indigenous materials for translating Christianity and theology (Bediako 1995:145ff); and 6. Each new translation expands the understanding of the gospel, but must bear a 'family resemblance' (Walls 1996:54).

practices for Corinthians. I want to know how the Hebrew Bible pattern of religiously appropriate eating practices influenced those of the Jewish-Christian church in Jerusalem and the Gentile-Christian church in Corinth. Translating from one set of communal practices to another via a third community was Paul's challenge. I will assess how Paul's translation effort evinces both continuity and discontinuity with the Jewish Christian tradition. Finally, I will comment on Christian identity for Christian Corinthians in light of Paul's apostolic advice and viewed conceptually in a gospel pattern formed from tacit subsidiaries.

Paul was a Pharisee and 'free born' Roman citizen. He was fluent in Hebrew and Greek, the biblical languages. So Saul, later renamed Paul, belonged to the Jewish faith and culture; yet he also found himself at home in the Roman Empire and within the Greek intellectual world. A person of one culture who visits or moves into another culture has the opportunity to see elements of the new culture from a certain distance. This may seem a disadvantage since the outsider likely will stumble over customs and courtesies and fail to use the optimal word or phrase in given situations. The missionary, however, may discover this to be an advantage in that pieces of the cultural fabric that the insiders take for granted are more visible to the outsider. This allows the missionary to compare the new culture's way of doing something with the familiar way of the missionary's home.

Borrowing Polanyi's term, I call such an outsider a tacit observer. Negotiating in different languages and cultures requires attentiveness to cultural particularities, or tacit subsidiaries. Paul used his multicultural background to translate the gospel from his Jewish roots to Gentile Christian communities. He functioned as both an insider and an outsider in Jewish and Gentile settings. He understood the reasons for Jewish dietary restrictions but also was at home in a wider world that celebrated freedom. Thus, he could critique Judaizers in Galatia for constricting the gospel of grace. And, he could

correct Corinthians for taking too much advantage of their freedom available in Christ and practiced in the faith community.

6.5.1 Translation Implies Conversion

Andrew Walls understands Christian conversion as a type of translation. A community, a family, or an individual turns toward Christ in faith and begins to understand old ways and former thinking in light of Christ. So how did Paul help the Corinthians to determine how to exercise this new allegiance to Christ in their pagan setting?

Paul moved from divine revelation in the Hebrew Bible to questions the Corinthians raised about eating and dining. Polanyi's schema of tacit knowing follows a *from-to* sequence. In all of our knowing we reason from various subsidiary thoughts or actions to focus on a more explicit meaning. Following this trajectory of moving from tacit particulars to a focal subject or pattern, we can see Paul's translating at work.

Paul quotes Corinthian slogans the Corinthians have used in attending to their arguments and cites biblical passages in offering his advice. In one case a Corinthian slogan also is a scriptural allusion. Both the slogans and scriptures cited are sets of tacit particulars that Paul weaves together for making his argument. In 1 Corinthians 8:1-13, Paul cites four slogans.²⁰

8:1	'all of us possess knowledge'	Corinthian slogan	
8:4a	'no idol exists in the world'	Corinthian slogan	
8.4b	'there is no God but one'	Corinthian slogan	Deut 6:4
8.8	'Food will not bring us close to God.'	Corinthian slogan	

Verse 8:4b represents a citation of the great Hebrew text, the *Shema*. Paul agrees with the Corinthian slogan based on Deuteronomy 6:4 that 'there is no God but one' (Yahweh). The Corinthian believers reference this text and use the idea to argue that

²⁰ In 10:23 Paul cites another Corinthian slogan, 'all things are lawful' but then counters with two other aphorisms: 'not all things are beneficial' nor do 'all things build up'.

idols are nonentities without meaning or power. In chapter 10 Paul appeals to this same idea of one God to warn the Corinthians against idolatry. What Paul knows, and the Corinthian believers apparently do not know, is the dangerous association between ‘dead’ idols and ‘living’ demons. The apostle knows Deuteronomy 6:4, and he also knows Deuteronomy 32. Paul’s gospel pattern of radical monotheism includes particulars about enemies such as demons and idolatry.

N.T. Wright argues convincingly that Paul goes on in 1 Corinthians 8 to flesh out an understanding of ‘there is no God but one’ with a Christian redefinition of the Jewish confession of faith, the Shema. (1992:121) What Paul is doing, on this reading, is seeking to present a monotheism that avoids the dangers of dualism on the one hand and paganism on the other. The concern about paganism is obvious enough. Some Corinthian disciples were arguing for the freedom to enter the pagan temples in order to dine with friends. Paul asserts a strong Jewish objection that sees paganism linked to idolatry. He resists any kind of dualism that sees bodily appetites as lower than spiritual concerns or certain kinds of food as off limits per se. God has created all things good, including sex, marriage, food, and dining, but not all settings and situations are good. The real *gnosis* (knowledge) is not the believer’s *gnosis* of God but *gnosis* by God of the believer. The sign of this *gnosis* upon the believer is the keeping of the *Shema*: you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and, of course, avoid idolatry (Wright 1992:127).

Paul expands the monotheistic formula in 8:6: ‘yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.’ Wright concludes that Paul has redefined the doctrine that God is the one and only God and creator of the world. He

has redefined it Christologically²¹ (Wright 1992:129-130). Jesus, in Paul's Gospel picture, is Lord and God. No other god, but the Father, Son, and Spirit, may be worshiped. Jesus also is the servant who loves to the point of self-emptying and sacrifice. This Christological understanding of Jesus, the crucified and risen one, gives Paul his reasons for admonishing the Corinthians whose freedom, as followers of Christ, is never freedom to drift into idolatry, and they do not have a right to fail to love a 'weaker brother'.

Paul makes reference to several other biblical passages over the course of his long argument in 1 Corinthians 8-10. In 9:9 Paul cites Deuteronomy 25:4 (you shall not muzzle an ox) and in chapter ten he draws a parallel between the Israelites committing idolatry in the wilderness and the danger facing the Corinthians who dine in the pagan temples.²² These passages function as tacit dimensions of Paul's apprehension of Jesus' good news and teaching.

Paul cites Psalm 24:1 in 10:25-26. Paul declares, 'Eat whatever is sold in the meat market without raising any question on the ground of conscience, for the earth and its fullness are the Lord's.' This advice and scriptural warrant show Paul avoiding the extreme of dualism. Meat per se is not ruled out of bounds. Even meat slaughtered in some fashion or place is no longer forbidden. Paul argues from a Hebrew scripture 'creation premise' in Psalm 24 but sees the gospel no longer constricted by the boundaries of Leviticus 17 and 18. Understanding this change in perspective raises a natural question about Paul's learning process to see Gentiles as full partners in the new covenant. I contend that the deliberations at the Jerusalem Council and its Apostolic Decree influenced Paul in his translation project to assist the Corinthians with their questions about food. Paul is reasoning from Old Testament precedent practices as a set

²¹ Paul's Christological portraits in Colossians 1 and Philippians 2 accord with his theological declaration in 1 Corinthians 8:6.

²² In 10:7-10, Paul quotes from Exodus 32:1-7, Numbers 25:1, Numbers 21:5-6, Psalm 78:18-19, and Numbers 16:41-50.

of tacit particulars. Yet he also recognises the power of Christian conversion and its concomitant teaching on freedom. The appreciation of freedom is another tacit particular that leads Paul to configure a new ethical pattern as he balances source and receptor concerns. Paul's apostolic advice constitutes a translation of gospel practices.

6.5.2 Family Resemblance

Andrew Walls speaks of a family resemblance that links all authentic translations of the Christian gospel. Various incarnations of Christian faith in cultures around the world necessarily will display different flavours or colours. Yet the congruence between source and receptor gospel patterns will reflect common ground among these gospel translations. Kwame Bediako refers to the gospel's translatability as another way of saying universality. Christian religion has a universal accessibility to various contexts because it is infinitely translatable. The gospel will display contextual particularities reflecting its various cultural settings but it will be recognisable as the same faith.

When Paul sought to comment on Corinthian dining practices in pagan temples, how did he know if his conclusions would be a departure from Christian practices or the establishment of them? I assert that Paul's translation of the gospel for the Gentiles does bear a sufficient family resemblance with gospel understandings of the Jerusalem church. At the same time, Paul was establishing fresh understandings of how the gospel would enter the new world of first century Gentiles. Christianity naturally exhibits both continuity and discontinuity with the Jewish faith that holds to the first covenant. Tim Tennent labels this as a multi-cultural solution to the problem of missionary communication into new settings (Tennent 2010:327-8).

In its early years the Christian church expanded from a Jewish base in Jerusalem to a Jewish-Gentile base in Antioch. As Paul and his companions evangelised Gentiles in the Mediterranean region, he took up the challenge to translate Christ for new believers who

neither practiced Jewish customs nor appreciated Old Testament law. Paul's mission experience and the dispute in Galatia helped him frame Christian freedom in the face of those who wanted the new Gentile believers to adopt Jewish Christian customs. I believe that the discussions and decisions of the Jerusalem Council served as a tacit influence on Paul even though he makes no explicit mention of the Apostolic Decree in his letter to the Corinthians.²³

The Jerusalem Council was occasioned by the evangelism efforts of Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary journey (Acts 13-14). After success in Cyprus, Pisidia, and Pamphylia, Paul and Barnabas returned to Syrian Antioch and met a surprising challenge. Visitors from Judea insisted that Gentile Christians should be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses (Acts 15:1). Paul, who had laboured among these Gentiles, disagreed vigorously. Acts 15:6-21 narrates the council meeting in Jerusalem where Paul and Barnabas consult apostles and elders to get a definitive answer. Peter supplies testimony at the meeting of his encounter with Cornelius (Acts 10) as evidence that the Spirit has been given to the Gentiles (Acts 15:9). Paul and Barnabas tell of their journey as well (Acts 15:12). In Luke's account it is James, the brother of Jesus and head of the Jerusalem church, who renders the verdict (15:13ff).

Here the waters of interpretation become trickier to navigate. Luke provides three versions of James' verdict in Acts (15:20, 29; 21:25). The first version is what Luke

²³ Luke mentions the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) in his narrative about Paul and Barnabas' missionary journey. In Acts 16 Luke tells of Paul separating from Barnabas and taking on Silas as a new traveling companion. Following the majority of New Testament commentaries on Acts, I interpret the so-called Jerusalem Council as an historical event but note that what we have in Luke's account is Luke's interpretation of both the meeting and the Apostolic Decree. Luke's reporting and summary necessarily highlight some items and leave out other details of the discussions. See Becker's discussion of Acts 15 vis-à-vis Galatians 2 and possible chronologies. I agree with Becker that at the council meeting, at least, the delegates decided to give their basic consent to the Gentile mission and acknowledged a Christian community independent of the synagogue (Becker 1993:153-5). See Hemer on the historicity of Acts where he asks if Acts 11 and Acts 15 are 'doublets of the same events or that one or both are seriously misplaced' (Hemer 1989:47). Hemer concludes the Jerusalem Council occurred in the winter-spring of 48-49 and that Luke's account 'shows in the main a Pauline perspective' (1989:269, 346). D. Bock (2007:499) also dates the council event as 48-49. R. Pervo states that it is possible that the decree did originate in Jerusalem but finds it more likely that it was worked out 'in a mixed Diaspora community where the desire for compromise was strong' (Pervo 2009:376). Pervo offers his opinion that the decree functioned to provide 'a minimal platform for sacramental fellowship' in communities where some believers had qualms about dietary matters (2009:376).

reports in his narrative about the Jerusalem meeting (15:20); the second version is written in a letter to be carried to certain Gentile churches (15:29); and the third version occurs later in the Acts narrative, during Paul's last visit to Jerusalem when the elders heard his report and summarised the letter sent to Gentile believers (21:25).

What does the decree actually say? The first version (Acts 15:20) reads, 'but we should write to them to abstain only from things polluted by idols and from fornication and from whatever has been strangled and from blood.' In its three appearances the Apostolic Decree warns Gentile believers to abstain from four items:

- 15:20 pollutions of idols, fornication, (animals) strangled, blood
- 15:29 idol sacrifice, blood, (animals) strangled, fornication
- 21:25 idol sacrifice, blood, (animals) strangled, fornication

The listings are quite similar, though not identical. The order of the terms changes, and two different words are used to denote involvement in idolatry: one in James' speech and the other in the letter and the subsequent reference to it. Apart from these points, the three versions correspond closely. I do not find the small differences to be of any significance for this discussion. Three of the prohibitions (idols, strangled, blood) have to do with the preparation of food and one (*porneia* or illicit sex) does not.

Possible interpretations of the Apostolic Decree vary. A first possibility views it as a concession to minimal provisions of the Levitical code so that Gentile Christians might respect their Jewish brothers and sisters and their dietary restrictions (Bauckham 1995:452-67). Another view ties these four prohibitions to commands given to Noah and his family when they emerged from the ark (Genesis 9:3-6). Seven commands were issued, and some similarity between the Apostolic Decree and several of these commands exist (Bockmuehl 1995:80-93). A third view sees all four prohibitions as a package of evils associated with pagan worship (Witherington 1994:41-3; Wedderburn 1993:383-5).

Witherington sums up this latter view as follows:

The reference to idol-meat in 15:29 makes clear that James is thinking of what happens in pagan temples and is prohibiting participation in dinners there. James, like Paul, is arguing that Gentile Christians should avoid a venue where sacrificial meat and immorality are both found—namely, pagan temples, where, indeed, all four of the items listed in Acts 15:20 and 29 were available. The issue is not where we might find these four items separately but where we might find all four of them together. (1994:43)

I agree with Witherington and Wedderburn that this third view describes what James has in mind when he issues the ruling. By this reading James is concerned about what transpires in pagan temples and advises Gentiles to avoid the cluster of practices (idol-worship, eating meat, dining, and sexual immorality) associated with temple dining. Another New Testament reference to idol food is in Revelation 2:20 (the warning to the church in Thyatira) where *porneia* is associated with *eidolothyta*. If this interpretation is correct then James is not requiring Gentiles to observe Old Testament food laws. In 1 Corinthians 8-10 Paul is following the logic of the Apostolic Decree in forbidding temple dining but not prohibiting temple food sold in the marketplace.

Paul reasons from Old Testament principles, from the decisions and discussions of the Jerusalem Council and from his own understanding of Christian freedom to adjudicate the Corinthian request to dine in the pagan temples.²⁴ In his overall argument he carefully and selectively applies prescriptive and descriptive material from the old covenant because a new covenant has been inaugurated in Christ. Yet he sees the two covenants linked together. He seeks to follow his Lord in discerning how the law is fulfilled rather than abolished in Christ (Matthew 5:17). Paul's conception of the gospel pattern for a church admitting Gentiles developed as he helped young Gentile churches wrestle with theological and ethical issues. The Corinthian questions led him to affirm monotheism, Christology, love, and forbearance. Similarly Paul opposed association with demons and immorality and limits expressions of freedom that do not regard the

²⁴ As Paul moved away from Jerusalem and Antioch, his mission became polycentric and his preoccupation with Gentile Christian matters increased. His interpretation of one's 'freedom in Christ' is on display in his polemical statements in the Letter to the Galatians. See especially Galatians 2.

scruples of a fellow Christian. These elements create the overall pattern or framework as tacit particulars in the Pauline gospel pattern.

Regarding the question of family resemblance, I find a close congruence between what James declared in Jerusalem and Paul subsequently applied in Corinth. The speeches given at the Jerusalem Council are largely unknown to modern Bible readers because Luke's account is succinct and probably depends in some degree upon Paul's influence. What a fascinating conversation it must have been. The decision not to impose Jewish dietary regulations or circumcision upon Gentile converts meant that Gentile believers were truly converts and not proselytes. Lamin Sanneh aptly summarises the significance of the early church's momentous decision at the Jerusalem Council,

The early Church, Jewish in flavour and Mosaic in code yet interpreted by Paul, in its efforts to extend its missionary message and praxis, entered new cultures by allowing the religion to arrive without the requirement of deference to the originating culture. (1989:1)

6.5.3 Identity

Kwame Bediako aptly recognises Christian identity as a necessary and appropriate connecting of the personal and communal past with the new situation of being 'in Christ' that arises from conversion. Writing from his perspective in Ghana he seeks to show how the African Christian can be truly 'African' and truly 'Christian' using categories that treat sympathetically the primal and the indigenous elements of religious and cultural life in sub-Saharan Africa. Understanding one's identity as a Christian is a chapter or a thread in a religious journey that follows the earlier chapter of conversion. If conversion launches a process of turning all of life toward Christ, then the disciple will have to discover what the gospel affirms and what the gospel critiques about life and culture.

What parts of Paul's larger discussion about idol food and related questions give us insight about Christian identity for a Corinthian believer? The Corinthians, like other Gentiles, did not observe Jewish laws or customs. They likely would have known Hellenistic Jews and been aware of Jewish regulations about eating meat. Early Christian preaching by Peter, Paul, Apollos, and others included references to Israel and Old Testament passages. What did it mean for Corinthian followers of Jesus to receive Israel's story as a part of their own narrative? Walls suggests that Gentile Christians thought of themselves in 'some respect continuous with ancient Israel' even though some might have found it hard to form any concept of ancient Israel. Anyone in Christ does not start or continue life in a vacuum. 'The adoption into Israel becomes a universalizing factor...' (Walls 1996:7-9).

Paul, whose roots in Jewish faith and Pharisaism made him acutely aware of the demands of law, found himself in Corinth both championing Christian freedom and drawing its boundaries. Polanyian insights help one to see more clearly how Paul translates as an apostle and missionary theologian. His themes in the idol food discussion for the Corinthians drew upon the Corinthian slogans and pertinent scriptures that can be viewed as tacit particulars comprising a larger pattern. These tacit clues combine to show us a Pauline picture of Christian identity for Corinthians. Paul has indwelt the Corinthian setting even as he previously had indwelt the world of Torah and Temple. The key identity themes in 1 Corinthians 8-10 are: *gnosis*, *agape*, freedom or 'rights', and idolatry. Paul uses his Christian understanding of *agape* to help the Corinthians see better the limits of knowledge, the nuances of freedom, and the dangers of idolatrous associations.

Paul counters the appeal to *gnosis* by contrasting it with *agape*. The former puffs up but the latter builds up (8:1).²⁵ He questions the knowledge of the Corinthians in 8:2 and goes on in 8:3 to describe loving God as the way to experience being known by God. P.D. Gardner argues the possibility ‘that the Corinthians knowledge claims were understood as a charismatic spiritual gift.’ Gardner points out that Paul also contrasts love and knowledge in his treatment of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12-14. The Greek word *fusio* occurs six times in this Pauline letter (4:6, 18, 19, 5:2, 8:1, 13:4) but only once in the rest of the New Testament (Colossians 2:18) (Gardner 1994:24).

Paul critiques the tendency of insisting on rights or using freedom in ways that harm another believer or the community. The discussion of apostolic rights in chapter 9 is intended in part to show the Corinthians a better way of setting aside freedom in order to show love. He answers his own question, ‘Am I free?’ (9:1), by opting to make himself ‘a slave for all’ (9:19). Paul’s preference for showing love over exercising freedom is summarised in 10:24, ‘No one should seek his or her own interests but the well-being of the other’ (Thiselton 2000:779).²⁶

It may at first seem unusual to speak about idolatry in constructing a picture of Christian identity. It is of course, the opposite of idol-worship that Paul construes as a primary marker of faith and discipleship. The idea that Paul emphasises Old Testament monotheism in his argument and expands its parameters to include Christological monotheism was mentioned earlier. The Corinthian disciples are urged to flee from idols and demons. As new converts they must join their Jewish Christian brothers and sisters and even their Jewish neighbours in an exclusive allegiance to the one true God, now understood as Father and Lord.²⁷ In arguing from the Shema and in seeing Jesus as

²⁵ Several commentators point out that the term *fusio* (inflates) calls to mind the self-importance of the puffed up frog in Aesop’s fables. See Thiselton (2000:622).

²⁶ Translation by A. Thiselton.

²⁷ Although references to the Spirit (Holy Spirit) are plentiful in 1 Corinthians, it is not clear whether an understanding of God as triune was taught by Paul. His benediction in 2 Corinthians 13:13 certainly manifests a trinitarian pattern.

Lord and agent of God's creation Paul tacitly implies that the Christian response to the true God is to love God with the whole being. Again, Paul appeals to *agape*, though tacitly here, to correct inadequate understandings among the Corinthians. Paul's ethical advice about food and dining provides material for the converted Corinthian to understand new identity in Christ as shaped by love. Love is greater than knowledge, stronger than freedom, and powerfully leads one to worship God. Paul extols love in his love chapter (1 Corinthians 13) and famously concludes, 'the greatest of these is love.'

6.6 Conclusion

When Paul arrived in Corinth shortly after Aquila and Priscilla (49 CE), he found a city enjoying new wealth from commerce and the Isthmian Games. The values of competition, success, self-promotion, and wealth were on display. Paul arrived with the Christian gospel and declared his reliance on spiritual power rather than human wisdom.

When I came to you, brothers and sisters, I did not come proclaiming the mystery of God to you in lofty words or wisdom. ²For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and him crucified. ³And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling. ⁴My speech and my proclamation were not with plausible words of wisdom, but with a demonstration of the Spirit and of power, ⁵so that your faith might rest not on human wisdom but on the power of God. (1 Corinthians 2:1-5)

Paul supported himself with his tent-making trade. He did not offer himself as a lecturer or teacher or one seeking a patron. He did present himself as an apostle commissioned to preach good news and to plant churches. He wrote to the Corinthian Christians several years later with a first-hand understanding of their pagan setting and the issues that challenged their discipleship. He knew that they had a tendency to overvalue their gifts of knowledge, wisdom, and freedom. Thus he reminded them about respect for others, forbearance, humility, and love. Witherington offers this summary:

In Paul's time many in Corinth were already suffering from a self-made-person-escapes-humble-origins syndrome ... Paul's servant role contradicted expected values in a city where social climbing was a major preoccupation'. (1994:20-21)

Thiselton comments, 'The Corinthian concern for autonomy led them to devalue the trans local character of the Christian identity.' (2000:77) Paul tells them three times that they are called alongside others, 'called to be a holy people, together with all who call on the name of the Lord ... in every place, both their Lord and ours' (1 Corinthians 1:2). Paul challenges the Corinthians' emphasis on 'freedom and knowledge' with his words about 'love and respect for the other' in 8:1-11:1.

This penchant for autonomy and insistence on rights manifested itself in a divided church community in Corinth.²⁸ How divided was the Christian community in Corinth? Paul's community concern is apparent in his sarcastic reference to persons following different teachers and preachers (3:3-37). He also levels a critique about the poor manners of the Corinthians when participating in the Lord's Supper (11:17-22). Thiselton observes that 11:2-16, 17-34, plus chapters 12-14, share with chapters 8-10 an exposition of the themes of love and respect; such an emphasis indicates how important this topic is throughout the epistle (2000:607). This concern for the community runs throughout 1 Corinthians and is congruent with Paul's emphasis on *agape* in his ministry.

Regarding the *adiaphora*, Paul presents himself as free yet he has made himself a slave for purpose of gaining followers of Christ. Paul anticipates the opportunity for making errors in judgment and practice when it comes to these matters. Paul chooses to risk erring in undervaluing freedom and improperly restraining it as opposed to flaunting it without adequate regard for others. Those who value the law will contend

²⁸ There is more than one theory about the sociological character of the Corinthian faith community. One view has to do with the Graeco-Roman patronage system that negotiated status and influence by sponsoring people and events. Cf. Fee 1987:399-400. Thiselton (2005:12-13, 75) refers to 'peer groups' and Witherington (1994:20-25) emphasises the disparity between rich and poor. Paul refers to 'the strong' and 'the weak' but provides few other identifying markers.

with Paul's view of freedom. Most groups have their own set of rules for community life. Strict adherence to rules elevates a concern for the law to legalism, and thinking that God cares about things because believers in God care about them, casts those believers under law regarding mere *adiaphora*. Flaunting newfound freedom in the face of those still bound to the rules is uncaring and unloving. Finally, freedom, according to Paul, is for the sake of the gospel, not for the self.

The final word in this section (11:1) is an imperative in which Paul again invites the Corinthians to imitate him as he imitates Christ, 'Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.' He has made the same invitation in 1 Corinthians 4:16. The kenosis passage in Philippians 2:5-11, also from the hand of Paul, presents Jesus as a humble servant as he gives up status and rights. So Paul argues in 9:1-27, asserting his apostleship, yet disclaiming his apostolic rights. An imitation pattern is presented to the Corinthians calling them to humility, forbearance, love, and mutuality. The pattern is a lifestyle of placing the welfare of the other before that of self (Thiselton 2000:796). In Paul's formulation of Christian ethics he does not simply substitute a new set of rules. He celebrates what God has made in this world and he offers a point of view that keeps the cross of Christ always in view.

My view of mission as translation helps to discern what Paul is addressing in and saying to the church. A key feature of this mission-as-translation conceptualisation values a balance between source and receptor. This works out in the missionary paying equal attention to the source materials and the contextual factors. The missionary also does well to assume a humble stance about the missionary's own contextual setting and appropriation of the gospel. Paul's sources have been shown to be various Old Testament texts and principles plus the Apostolic Decree. His receptor audience is the Christian community in Corinth about 54 CE. A contextualisation model may lead the interpreter to understand Paul's use of source material in a different way. An emphasis

on contextual theology in Corinth might display more sympathy with the more expansive notion of freedom championed by the strong believers in Corinth. The Corinthian Christians' own arguments displayed a focus on their own context and their own freedom. Their ignorance of Old Testament sensibilities about idolatry is why Paul finds them in error about going to the temples and dining there. Paul, a bridge figure between Jewish and Gentile Christianity, exhibits a careful balance in his own work as a missional translator. His command of the tradition, his insights about the new contextual challenges, and his sensitive application of the one to the other establish Paul as a remarkable example of a missionary translator. I do acknowledge, however, that because Paul's letters have canonical status, I am inclined to give Paul some benefit of the doubt in assessing his actions and interpretations.

The three translation features gleaned from the study of linguistic sources in Chapter Three are:

1. Similarity and difference refers to ontology and translation.
2. Transformation means conversion within the translation process.
3. Multiplicity means polyglossic or multilingual achievement.

In this case study I particularly highlight the feature of transformation or conversion that occurs in the process of translation. Paul's ethical advice to the Corinthians shows a development of thinking about how God's covenant people act together when buying food in the market or while dining with unbelievers. Paul shows the Corinthian believers a transformed view of the spirit world that helps them see the dangers of dining in the pagan temples. The Corinthian disciples need to be converted in order to understand that in the case of temple dining, it is not what is eaten, but where it is eaten that concerns Paul. Paul's own stated conclusions in the matter lead me to infer that the apostle has changed his mind regarding his prior religious views about food 'sacrificed to idols' and dining in pagan temples. Paul's own conversion toward faith in Christ

leads to a new appreciation of freedom in Christ. Subsequently, he translates his old covenant understandings in light of new understandings of what it means to follow Jesus.

My effort to understand Paul's ethical advice to the Corinthians as an example of missional translation has drawn upon Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing. Thus, I have identified strands in Paul's argument as tacit particulars. Following where each tacit coefficient leads along the *from-to* trajectory has shown us that Paul reasons:

1. From idols to demons,
2. From Old Testament monotheism to Christological monotheism,
3. From Christological faith to freedom constrained by love,
4. From Old Testament examples to warnings about idolatry,
5. From the Apostolic Decree and the concomitant discussions surrounding the Jerusalem Council to the Corinthian concern about temple dining settings, and
6. From an unfettered freedom in the pagan, Hellenistic world to a freedom anchored in Christ, in *agape*, and in humility.

It is important to see where Paul draws resources for his ethical reasoning. He is a pioneer as a missionary ethicist. Because we receive his advice second-hand in an epistle, Polanyi's insight about tacit particulars helps the reader to reconstruct Paul's reasoning sequence. Paul's advice in 1 Corinthians 8-10 is echoed in Romans 14. The reader finds congruence between Paul's ethical advice to the Romans and his instructions to the Corinthians.

In the Roman letter he provides another term, 'stumbling block', that may indicate some development of Paul's application of *agape* in this later letter. He mentions three issues troubling the Romans: the keeping of certain days, a concern about eating certain foods, and the matter of drinking wine. Diverse Christian practices threatened to divide the Roman disciples. Unlike the Corinthian issue, there seem to be no pagan temples in

view in the Roman letter. Paul's concern that Christians exercise and limit their freedom out of regard for one another's scruples remains front and centre. Paul sums up his teaching for the Romans in Romans 14:13-17:

¹³Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. ¹⁴I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself; but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵If your brother or sister is being injured by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. Do not let what you eat cause the ruin of one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶So do not let your good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.

In the Fourth Gospel Jesus (the word become flesh) is identified as manifesting glory as a father's only son and as 'full of grace and truth' (John 1:14). Grace and truth in the New Testament correspond to *hesed* (lovingkindness) and *emet* (faithfulness) in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul reflects the Old Testament understanding of God's nature with balanced advice to the Corinthians by enjoining them both to love another (regard for weaker brother, no stumbling block) and to respect the dangerous truth about the presence of demons who pose a spiritual threat to disciples. He follows his own advice by 'speaking the truth in love' (Ephesians 4:15).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Dream of the Rood Case Study: A Gospel Picture from Anglo-Saxon Christianity

7.1 Introduction

In the following case study I argue that the Old English poem, *The Dream of the Rood*, as found both in the Vercelli Book of poems and inscribed upon the Ruthwell Cross, reflects a Northumbrian Christian translation of the gospel, mediating primarily Celtic and Roman influences among others, yet representing a uniquely Anglo-Saxon identification of Jesus Christ as the servant-hero upon the cross.¹

Between 560 and 750 CE the Kingdom of Northumbria became a micro-Christendom with its own distinctive flavour of Christian culture.² In the north it was shaped in part by Irish and Pictish kingdoms on its borders. The monastery of Iona dominated this stream of influence. This influence is attested by the fact that the two constituent territories, Bernicia and Deira, retained their topographic Celtic names. Of these two territories Deira is distinguished by its maintaining Roman traditions (Cramp 1999:2-4).

Irish monasticism, on the one hand, produced a steady stream of Celtic *peregrini* who carried Irish Christian emphases to Northumbria and beyond.³ The Irish monk Columba founded the community at Iona that in turn spawned a number of monasteries in Ireland as well as in British and Anglo-Saxon territories. Being an island community, Iona resisted the encroaching influence of Rome longer than most other Irish communities. After 635, the monks of Iona re-established Christianity in Northumbria

¹ A third setting for a portion of the *DR* poem is the Brussels Cross, an antique cross-reliquary dating to the early eleventh century. The Brussels Cross fragment consists of only two lines that serves as an inscription title.

² The historical background of Northumbria I include follows the outlines of Peter Brown (2003) and Henry Mayr-Harting (1991).

³ The concept of *peregrinatio* is described as ‘becoming a stranger to one’s country for the sake of God.’ (Brown 2003:414) Celtic monks wandered into exile for reasons of spiritual discipline and/or mission.

after earlier Christian settlements had faded. Lindisfarne, founded by Aidan, became the leading monastery and learning centre of this incursion from Iona into Northumbria. Cuthbert followed Aidan as abbot and later became the bishop of Lindisfarne. Bede tells his remarkable story in his ecclesiastical history of the English people (*EH*).

Columbanus, an Irish scholar and peregrinus, travelled from Bangor east past the British Isles to establish monastic centres in Bobbio and Luxeil (modern Switzerland and France) beginning in 585 until his death in 615.⁴ Northumbrian political power also extended south as far as the Thames. These southern areas had absorbed Continental or Roman influences. Pope Gregory's Roman mission to England (Kent) established a great school at Canterbury and a monastic tradition that looked to Rome for marching orders and advice on the liturgy, the monastic rule, and matters of theology. Augustine, the missionary sent by Gregory from Rome, landed in Kent in 597, the same year that Columba died.

The Roman Church entered Northumbria additionally by means of a royal marriage in 625; Edwin of Northumbria wed Aethelbert, a Christian Kentish princess. Paulinus, an assistant sent by Gregory to accompany Augustine, served as the chaplain to the new queen and worked as an evangelist among the Northumbrians. This royal house supported two prominent clergymen with strong ties to Rome, Wilfrid and Biscop. Benedict Biscop, a noble-born Northumbrian, founded the monastic communities at Wearmouth and Jarrow. He made at least three trips to Rome and brought back religious books, relics, and an understanding of Roman architecture and the liturgy. He began his spiritual pilgrimage at Lindisfarne but his ten years abroad convinced him of Rome's superiority in matters both doctrinal and practical.

⁴ Columba, whose name means 'dove', established Iona in 563 with a band of 12 monks. Columba the Younger, 20 years younger, is known as Columbanus in Latin texts. The two leaders were austere in asceticism, competent as leaders, and worked vigorously into their seventies (McNeill 1974:157).

Each of these two streams of influence had political champions and leading clerical voices. The two parties were at odds over certain identity issues like the date of Easter and the shape of the monastic tonsure. Ecclesiastical structures differed as well. Augustine brought from Rome a system of dioceses and a hierarchy of clergy. Aidan and the Irish organized via the monastic house; leaders were abbots, and sometimes abbesses. Political power and personalities were no less important than theological precision. Northumbria's split personality, however, eventually gave way to a more integrated Christian population after the Synod of Whitby in 664. The division, which may have lasted 50 years, gave rise to three parties. One of the three included the remaining Celts or Hibernians loyal to Aidan's Irish ways and sympathetic English folk who formed the community of Mayo. A second, middle party, acceded to the Synod's tilt toward Rome regarding Easter dating and tonsure details, but remained loyal to the memory of Aidan and Irish influences. This group included Colman, who left Lindisfarne and took followers back to Ireland, and Eata, who became the new abbot at Lindisfarne. The third group was led by Wilfrid and remained suspicious of the Celts and Britons as being both heretical and schismatic (Brown 2003:49-64).⁵

Following Whitby, in 669 Pope Vitalian consecrated Theodore of Tarsus 'the first archbishop whom all the English obeyed' (Bede 1969:331). Having made a tour of his charge, Theodore filled the vacant bishoprics and in 672 presided over the first council of the entire English Church at Hertford. He established definite territorial boundaries for the various dioceses and founded new dioceses where needed. The law drawn up under his supervision, and according to his structure of dioceses and parishes, survived the turmoil of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and remains substantially intact today. Theodore founded a school at Canterbury that trained Christians from both the

⁵ Wilfrid's story is told by his biographer Eddius Stephanus. Stephanus, though highly sympathetic to Wilfrid, shows his hero to be ostentatious and quarrelsome as well as energetic and courageous. The *Life of Bishop Wilfrid*, thought to be written a decade after Wilfrid's death, is one of the earliest biographies of a Northumbrian cleric.

Celtic and the Roman traditions and did much to unite the two groups. Adrian, an African born abbot who had moved to Italy, headed the school (Charles-Edwards 2000:336-7).

The English historian, biblical scholar, and pious monk, Bede, is the dominant figure of Northumbria's Golden Age. Little is known about Bede except what he provides in his own writings. Scholars assume he was born about 672 and died in 735. He finished his magnum opus, *Ecclesiastical History*, only a few years before his death. He was a monk at the twin-sited monasteries, Wearmouth and Jarrow. He writes that he joined the community at the age of 7 years, was ordained as a deacon at 19, and became a priest at age 30. He seems always to have identified himself as English, probably a native of the Tyne-Wear lowlands. He was educated in the cloister by Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith. The rich monastic libraries afforded him the material needed to become one of the outstanding scholars of his age.⁶

A historian can look back in time and imagine Bede, a monk and scholar of this Anglo-Saxon era and region, looking west toward Iona and pondering the great Irish tradition of Patrick, Columba, and Columbanus, and then gazing east toward Europe, the Mediterranean, and to Rome and marking the influence of Gregory the Great.

His geographical world might have been limited, but Bede's intellectual horizons were vast. His reputation as an English writer rested on many strengths and was understood variously by the scores of writers who drew on his life and work. For many of them Bede represented an English identity that they wished to cultivate for themselves and adapt to their own ends. (Frantzen 2010:230)

The Roman linguistic legacy was literacy in Latin that transformed not only political and social aspects of the Roman Empire and subsequent barbarian kingdoms; it was a vehicle for the church's mission in the same era and the same regions. Barbarians acquired literacy only gradually, often along with Christian faith and practices (Richter

⁶ Bede's honourific title, Venerable, first appears in the ninth century in the records of the Church Councils held at Aix/Aachen in 816 and 836. The term is a later but powerful construct that became commonplace after the eleventh century; see Higham 2006:6-20.

1994:46-7). The Celtic practice of using Latin as the language of church and cloister helped vernacular tongues to stay in the background. At the same time exposure to written Latin likely prompted new ventures in writing Insular languages and dialects. *The Dream of the Rood* poem is remarkable, in part, because it is preserved not in Latin but in an eighth-century Old English dialect. The creator of the Ruthwell Cross utilised both languages for the rich message of the engravings, thus elevating the vernacular to the level of the *lingua franca*.

Augustine is even said to have devised Old English for this purpose (symbolism of writing and Christian culture) ... the earliest Anglo-Saxon charters are written not in variants of Roman cursive but in stately, high-grade uncials, of the sort usually reserved for religious texts. (Bede 1990:75)

Monuments, like stone crosses and sculpture, reflect the scriptural and spiritual understandings of the time.

Not for nothing they are the finest examples on the borders of kingdoms, on well-trodden routes: Ruthwell near a major crossing of the Solway, Bewcastle on the Maiden Way, etc.... Even when the elaborate monuments appear in ecclesiastical settings (monasteries) they were clearly meant to be seen, either on the edge of the enclosures, as at Jarrow or Tynemouth, or in a church. Many of these crosses are also literate monuments with messages in text, sculpture and decoration. (Cramp 1999:11)

7.2 *The Dream of the Rood* in Two Versions

The Dream of the Rood (DR) is a narrative poem in Old English about Christ, the cross, and the Crucifixion. It exists in two versions and is echoed in a third fragment. The longer version is found in a manuscript, the Vercelli Book, preserved in the cathedral library at Vercelli in northern Italy. The abbreviated version was inscribed upon a sculptured stone cross at Ruthwell, known as the Ruthwell Cross (RC), in Dumfriesshire, which lies just north of the English border in Scotland. The poetic

fragment is a two-line excerpt inscribed on the Brussels Cross, a cross-reliquary, now exhibited in the treasury of the Cathedral of Saints Michael and Gudule in Brussels.⁷

The longer and more sophisticated version of the poem exists in a single manuscript in the Vercelli cathedral library. Most scholars date the poem as belonging to the tenth century.⁸ The Vercelli manuscript also includes other prose and poetry pieces in Old English. The last poem in the collection is *Elene*, a narrative verse account of Helena's successful search for the remains of the true cross. Helena's search for the true cross and other relics and holy sites was conducted under the patronage of her son, the Emperor Constantine, in the middle of the fourth century (Swanton 1996:4-5). Because the *DR* and *Elene* both have the cross of Christ as subject, the influence of one upon the other is suggestive. Also probable is the inference that the cult of the true cross, strong in Constantinople since the fourth century, had made its way into Anglo-Saxon territory, perhaps as early as the age of Bede.

Because the Vercelli Codex includes poems attributed to Cynewulf, some scholars see the *DR* belonging to his school and locate it as part of the Alfredian renaissance in the late ninth century (Rissanen 1987:2). Other scholars see the poem belonging to the style and earlier age of Caedmon (Cook 1905:ix-xvi). The Vercelli version consists of 156 lines and is usually divided into four parts with the identity of the narrator determining the divisions. As in the rest of the Codex pieces, the linguistic forms are for the most part classical late West Saxon with a strong Anglian element. According to Swanton, 'punctuation is irregular and apparently syntactical rather than metrical in

⁷ The Brussels Cross likely was made in the south of England in the early eleventh century. It may have been brought out of England soon after the Norman Conquest. This study will not discuss it since it does not have a Northumbrian provenance and only bears witness to a fragment of the poem; see Ó Carragáin (2005:339-54).

⁸ In the collection are twenty-three anonymous Old English prose homilies including sermons on Christ's Passion and the Last Judgement. Bound with these prose pieces are six poems of varying length: *Andreas*, *The Fates of the Apostles*; two incomplete pieces called, in G.P. Krapp's edition, *Soul and Body I* and *Homiletic Fragment I*; and *The Dream of the Rood* (Krapp 1932:xlvii).

intention' and 'majuscules occur only sporadically' (1996:5-9). Neither the poem nor the rest of the Codex is illuminated or illustrated.

The shorter or lesser form of *The Dream of the Rood* poem (15 half lines) appears in Old English runes as an inscription upon portions of the Ruthwell Cross.⁹ This sculptured and inscribed stone monumental cross was constructed in the late seventh or early eighth century at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire. The monument, nearly six metres tall, stands inside a Presbyterian parish church located about a half of a mile from the northern shore of Solway Firth. Dumfriesshire is part of southwest Scotland; in the seventh and eight centuries it belonged to the upper region of Northumbria.

7.3 Relating the Two Texts

Here are two poems about the cross of Christ.¹⁰ The 15 lines on the RC roughly correspond to lines 39-41, 44-45, 48-49, 56-57, and 58-63 in the Vercelli poem. Some degree of literary identity between the two versions seems highly likely. How does one determine the relationship between the Ruthwell Cross with its Old English runic verses, constructed no later than the middle part of the eighth century, and the Vercelli Book that dates to the latter part of the tenth century? One scholar opined that it is 'a history of movement that stretches the imagination' (Sisam 1953:29-44). At least three possible explanations are in order.

The older poem on the Ruthwell Cross may have inspired a later poet to expand those 15 lines into the longer Vercelli narrative poem of 156 lines. Perhaps the Vercelli

⁹ I have included a more detailed description of the figural scenes and inscriptions on the Ruthwell Cross and the monument's historical background in Appendix 1. I argue that the details displayed in figures and textual inscriptions function as tacit particulars in a patterned depiction of the gospel.

¹⁰ Scholars have offered many interpretations of the *Dream of the Rood* from various disciplines, ranging from liturgy and theology to Old English and dream poetry to both Christian history and political history of the Anglo-Saxon period. E. Treharne writes that despite these many angles from which to analyse the poem, it 'represents a remarkable condensation of the core doctrine of Christian history' (Treharne 2007:145).

poem actually is older and the Ruthwell artist helped himself to portions suitable for quoting. He cited portions of the Vulgate for the other inscriptions and borrowed Mediterranean symbols as well. Another possibility is that the Ruthwell and Vercelli versions both rely on an older poem or earlier tradition.

My working hypothesis assumes a version of the third possibility. A long poem that explores the themes of the cross and crucifixion of Jesus was known to the Ruthwell creators, and they used a portion of it upon this elaborate cross-monument. A later and perhaps expanded version of the original poem was carried to Italy and deposited at Vercelli. Enough traffic by clergy and others between Northumbria and Rome makes this resting place for the Vercelli manuscript in an Italian cathedral entirely plausible. Because the Viking invasions destroyed monasteries and monastic treasures, it is fortunate that at least some books and other items were rescued and carried to safer places. Swanton offers a similar theory:

If the sprinkling of Anglian dialectical forms ... is not to be dismissed ... they suggest the previous existence of a full northern text. Indications of style and metre as well as the intellectual substance of the poem might place this early in the eighth century, with the flowering of the cross cult in Northumbria. The small number of early West Saxon forms might indicate at least one intermediate version, perhaps stimulated by Alfred's acquisition of important cross relics in 885. (1996:39)

If this poem originated as part of the Northumbrian Golden Age, then it belongs to the age of Bede. This dramatic narrative about the cross of Christ is in a concentrated and artistic form, a representation of the gospel. In the next section of this study I shall examine the lines of the Vercelli poem and draw conclusions about the portrait of Christ it offers. I will evaluate this artistic presentation of the gospel through the lens of missional translation as aided by Polanyian epistemology.

7.4 Analysis of the Talking Cross Poem¹¹

The *DR* falls into four parts. The first part (lines 1-27) is a midnight dream or visionary manifestation of the cross appearing to the poet. The second portion (28-121) is an address by the cross (personified by the poet), and eventually identified as *rood* in Old English.¹² The third section details the reflections and experience of the poet following the address (122-47). The fourth and briefest part (148-56) refers to the spirits in prison at the harrowing of hell and to the joy of angels and saints when Christ returns in triumph to his Father. This final passage seems out of place according to a number of scholars and may be a later addition (Cook 1905:xlii). The address of the cross, or the ‘inner monologue,’ is the dramatic crescendo of the poem and constitutes about 60 per cent of the poem; the introduction and the reflection passages are of nearly identical lengths to each other.

7.4.1 *The Dreamer Is the Narrator (1-27)*

This prologue recounts the visionary experience of the dreamer about a tree that becomes a cross. The vision begins in darkness at midnight. This poem of progressive enlightenment toward faith, or discipleship, moves from confusion and poor understanding toward clarity and certainty. The darkness of midnight (*what I dreamed at midnight*) gives way to semi-darkness (*it seemed to me that I might have seen a very strange tree*). The subjunctive in line 14 (*I might have seen*) gives way to clarity in line 21 (*I clearly saw*). At first the dreamer does not know what this object is (*beacen*); it appears as an object or beacon covered with radiant gold and gems.

¹¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of *DR* into modern English are taken from Ó Carragáin (2005) who translates and analyses the verses. For the convenience of the reader, the entire poem in a modern English translation (Kevin Crossley-Holland, translator) is shown in Appendix 2.

¹² The Anglo-Saxon terms *rood*, *rod*, or *rode*, all mean ‘cross.’

The dreamer's initial uncertainty about what he sees might also be accounted for by seeing in the poem the popular literary type of the Anglo-Saxon riddle. In these literary riddles an enigmatic object is made to describe itself in oblique terms, sometimes telling its history. The dramatic convention of an inanimate object speaking is a classical rhetorical device called 'prosopopoeia'.¹³ The riddle genre was popular in the seventh and eighth centuries in Latin and in vernacular languages.¹⁴

Then the glorious beauty of the tree causes a sudden overwhelming sense of sin in the dreamer. A Bible student might see as an inspirational source here Isaiah's throne-room vision, where a mystical apprehension of divine glory causes the young prophet to become keenly aware of his sinfulness (Isaiah 6). The dreamer reasons otherwise and speaks almost as if he had solved the riddle, breaking through the vision barrier of the jewels to the painful and ugly truth beneath. (*Jewels had covered beautifully the tree of the ruler. But still I could perceive through that gold the ancient agony of wretched men, could perceive that it first began to bleed on the right side, (16b-20a.)*). The dreamer's visionary intuition that under the radiance and glory is something painful prepares him to hear the story told by 'the best of woods'.

7.4.2 *The Cross Speaks (28-78, 79-121)*

The silence is broken and the dreamer's visual experience gives way to an auditory one. The dreamer as narrator recedes although he is addressed directly by the tree/cross. The tree's address begins with memory. (*That was long ago, I remember that yet, that I was hewn down at the forest's edge, moved from my trunk, (28-30a.)*). The tree begins almost as the dreamer does, in passivity and uncertainty, describing how evil men slew him in the forest. Soon he speaks of being resolute as he assumes the role of the suffering hero

¹³ Schlauch makes the case that Anglo-Saxons were familiar with this device (1940:23-34).

¹⁴ Swanton (1987:67) mentions Latin riddles by Hwaetberht of Wearmouth/Jarrow (716) and Tatwine, Archbishop of Canterbury (731-4).

and bears his lord unto death. The tree becomes the rood. The rood's speech and stance recall *Beowulf* in several instances.

Familiar examples ... are King Hrothgar seething with helpless anger under Grendel's unrelenting attacks on his hall, or Hengest enduring the long winter in a foreign hall, prevented for a time ... from avenging his king's death.¹⁵ (Irving 1969:104-06)

The rood's speech has been likened to 'a crucifixion narrative' and a 'vision transfigured into prayer' in the creative hands of this Anglo-Saxon monk-poet (Ó Carragáin 2005:308). Giving the cross a persona with attributes of personality and volition establishes physical and moral parallels between Christ and the cross. The cross identifies with his lord yet draws the reader into a 'fellow disciple' shared identity as well. The Crucifixion is presented simply but dramatically. Unlike the gospel accounts no one carries the cross, no weeping women are present, and no soldiers mock Jesus.

Christ is seen as a young hero who confidently strips for battle and mounts the cross eager to present himself as a sacrifice (40-42). The idea that the tree might have resisted his Lord's execution but dared not is stated four times (35, 42, 45, 47). (*I could have felled all its foes, but I stood fast.*). As a loyal thane under oath, the tree could have obeyed the usual obligations to defend the Lord but this tree/cross saw itself under higher orders to stand fast. The Anglo-Saxon indigenous framework of *dryhten* (lord or lords) and their *comitus* (band of warrior-thanes) is clearly in view.¹⁶ The poet tells the story of Christ's Passion in terms of *dryht* loyalties and conflicts. Here the heavenly *dryhten* willingly becomes a man and dies as a warrior in battle against sin and death in

¹⁵ Irving understands the first line of the rood's address (28-30a) as formulaic in the tradition of Anglo-Saxon heroic poetry a la Beowulf's long speech before he faced the dragon. He also sees in line 44 ('Rood was I raised up') a reminder of *Beowulf* (line 343) proclaiming his identity ('Beowulf is my name') as he advanced to face Grendel.

¹⁶ Bruce Mitchell argues that the poem 'resolves not only the pagan-Christian tensions within Anglo-Saxon culture but also current doctrinal discussions concerning the nature of Christ.' (Mitchell and Robinson 1992:257. He also avers that DR's vivid martial imagery and heroic qualities suggest it is a 'thoroughly Germanic poem' (1992:257). I argue conversely that the Saxon features are overshadowed by Nicene Christology and that the Germanic influence is but one among many.

order to free humankind and gain for man entry into the *dryht* of heaven (Lee 1972:177-8).

So far 'tree' has been the poet's favourite term for the tree/cross but *beam* (beam), *beacen* (beacon), *geagla* (gallows), *sige-beam* (victory-beam), and *wudu* (best of woods) also are used. The first occurrence of *rood* (rod) appears dramatically as the tree becomes the cross of the crucified and understands itself as destined to raise up the 'mighty king, the Lord of heavens.' This now becomes the occasion for the tree and the man to suffer together—driven nails, malicious gashes, and shed blood. The climax is stated in a terse half line, *Crist waes on rode* (Christ was on the Rood). This same phrase is given special prominence in the runic verses on the Ruthwell Cross. The brief phrase appears on the top of the west face. The 15 lines of the poem in the Ruthwell version all come from the crucifixion scene (Irving 1986:108-10).

Although human bystanders are not mentioned, all creation weeps. Clouds and darkness are signs that death and hell gain temporary victory. The rood has been identified as a tree, and not any tree, but also the tree of life; thus, the cosmic creation theme resonates throughout the poem. The rood, meanwhile, is identified as *on banan gesyhoe* (slayer or murderer) (66). The personified tree, loyal in performing his gruesome duty, nonetheless, has become the tree of death. Curiously, Satan is sometimes called *se bana* in Old English but seems not to be part of this particular story. The tree's fate, a terrible fate, is to be felled a second time and buried in a deep pit. Is it being killed and buried like its lord and not simply wounded? The tree buried, of course, also can be raised and honoured, like its lord. The other famous Vercelli poem, *Elene*, tells the story of the Emperor Constantine's mother Helen and her discovery and unearthing of the true cross.

The cross speaks as a character and describes itself as honoured in a way that explicitly is comparable to the way God honoured Mary, the mother of Jesus.

Indeed, the Lord of Glory, the guardian of the heavenly kingdom, then honoured me over hill-trees, just as almighty God also honoured his mother Mary herself over all the race of women, for the sake of all humankind. (90-94)

Blessed Mary and the personified cross are both preeminent because of what they have done for all humanity, one at incarnation and another at crucifixion. Ó Carragáin highlights this comparison and sees it as the climax of a paragraph that explains the significance of the cross on behalf of humankind (2005:308ff).¹⁷

Now you may hear, my beloved warrior, that I, the work of evil ones, have endured bitter sorrows. The time has now come in which men throughout the earth and all this glorious creation honour me: they pray to this sign.¹⁸ (78-94)

The crucifixion story is completed and the invention story, treated elsewhere in *Elene*, is introduced.¹⁹ Those who come to take the body of the Lord are not named. The body is not taken to a distant cave; Joseph of Arimathea is not named. An Anglo-Saxon coffin, rather, is carved out of stone at the foot of the cross. These contextual details do not match the accounts in the canonical Gospels but work in terms of the poem's dramatisation.

7.4.3 *The Dreamer Reflects Back* (122-47)

The poem's narrator shifts again and the dreamer returns. The dreamer receives the command of the cross to tell the vision (write the poem). His final lines mark a mood shift. His former disorientation has been yielded to a new perspective. He is pulled and pointed toward the tree/cross with a 'happy heart.'

¹⁷ Ó Carragáin draws a parallel between this section of the *DR* and the Roman Catholic liturgy of Wednesday in Holy Week. He also recalls Mary's words (Luke 1:38) in the Annunciation. Her acceptance of her role to become the Lord's mother mirrors the faithful acquiescence of the cross in the *DR* account, neither moving nor breaking against the Lord's word (35). The tradition that the Annunciation and the Crucifixion both occurred on March 25 was well known in Bede's time.

¹⁸ The cult of the cross and the sign of the cross are discussed in the conclusion to the poem's study.

¹⁹ The finding of the holy cross, associated with Helena, is also called the invention of the true cross; 'invention' is derived from the Latin *invenire*, meaning to find. In the poem's narrative the cross presents the body of the Lord to his followers who 'find' the body and place it in a tomb.

I prayed earnestly towards that tree with happy heart and great zeal, where I was alone with a tiny band. My mind was ready for the journey outward; I had lived through a great many times of miseries. (122-26a)

Two phrases are applied to the dreamer just after the rood has finished speaking. One, *elne mycle* (with great eagerness or with great zeal), describes the dreamer's desire to pray to the rood. It also repeats in parallel fashion the *elne mycle* with which the 'Prince of mankind' hurried to mount up on the tree (34). Here is a case of divine action followed by human response. The second phrase is *maete werede* (with few followers or alone), probably referring to the midnight loneliness of the dreamer and recalling the solitary experience of the crucified lord who alone makes atonement for sin. The reader or 'worshipper' now learns from the dreamer whose vision and poem instruct in the ways of worshipping the Lord and venerating his cross.

7.4.4 *The Dreamer Reflects Forward (147-56)*

The dreamer's response to the best of dreams also is one of hope in the eschatological vision of the cross. Yet there is disjointedness in the last section as the reader tries to sort out the poet's introduction of new themes in a brief conclusion. Specifically, there is the first mention of the harrowing of hell and then a mention of the Ascension. Why did not the cross mention this harrowing in his speech? The theme, a common one in Anglo-Saxon Christian understanding, is appropriated as the heroic Son appears to open up hell and lead the Old Testament saints in triumph and salvation. This brief conclusion may have been a later addition. There are references to the Son's victory, ascension, glory, heaven, and his return to earth. No specific mention is made, however, of the Resurrection. It is implied but not described nor declared.

Still the themes of judgment and harrowing do fit with the overall themes of Christ and his cross, the Crucifixion, and Incarnation. The many references in the poem to humankind come to a definite conclusion in the scene of the harrowing. Holy ones in

heaven, men and women in middle-earth, all of humankind assembled at the last judgment, and various souls in hell are all represented. The cosmic reach of the poem has grown and includes all souls.

7.5 Tacit Particulars and Christian Influences Reflected in the *DR*

The various themes in the Ruthwell iconography plus the Latin inscriptions offer a richly textured theological and liturgical statement. The poetic verses in their fuller version in the Vercelli text also manifest a sophisticated theological expression. If we invoke Michael Polanyi's understanding of knowledge pictured as a gestalt pattern, the pieces or colours of the related tapestries of the RC and the *DR* can be viewed meaningfully both as parts of a larger whole and as entities in and of themselves. The interpreter is challenged to integrate the subsidiary clues or tacit particulars into a coherent pattern. Such patterns are composed of tacit particulars that combine to depict ideas, themes, influences, and goals, intended and accidental, of the author and receptor. For our primary missional purpose, we shall investigate the manner in which Jesus the Christ is understood in the pieces of text, both Latin and runic, and in stone, figural and decorative. Similarly we will study how the Christian gospel is presented in these two versions. We will try to reconstruct the pattern of influences and emphases, using the Polanyian from-to structure of tacit knowing.

A recent scholarly study of the Ruthwell Cross and its sister monument, the Bewcastle Cross, prompted the writers to describe their work as sifting through fragments of Northumbrian history.

We have been arguing for a history that refocuses critical attention on conceptions of the fragmentary, the particular and the local—the bits and pieces of Anglo-Saxon culture that form the basis of the evidence ... the Ruthwell and Bewcastle monuments ... have to be seen and understood as two material forms or fragments of ideology, [each] affecting and effecting the idea of 'Northumbria.' (Orton et al. 2007:144, 203)

This summary statement from the work by Orton and Wood with Lees comes from two historians and one literary scholar. I consider these fragments as tacit particulars or components integrated to form a missional pattern of period Christianity. These fragments, many of them material art, evince traces of influence from Celtic, Roman, Mediterranean, and Anglian elements. The *DR* poems, understood as an Anglo-Saxon manifestation of Christian devotion, combine these elements in a way that gives evidence of a new translation of the Christian gospel was emerging in eighth-century Northumbria. The Anglo-Saxon translation, like all translations and retranslations, however, must be evaluated alongside the sources. The tacit particulars or compositional elements of the pictures presented by the *DR* poem and the RC monument may be categorised into four sets of traditions or influences.

7.5.1 Celtic Influences

The Ionan monks' arrival at Lindisfarne in 635, and the new contacts and patronage they established, are often seen as introducing Hiberno-Saxon art traditions and as inaugurating Northumbria's Golden Age. The Irish taught Latin as a foreign language and adapted Latin scriptures and liturgies for passing on their faith. They pioneered the use of the vernacular, both prose and poetry, for devotional and pedagogical purposes. These missional tactics are themselves examples of mission as textual translation. They employed various resources to reach people in a largely oral culture with scriptural religion (Stancliffe 2010:79-80). This is demonstrated in manuscripts in which fragmented and ambiguous patterns of bird, beast, and human merge and give way to a clear differentiation of motifs: spiral form patterns and geometric interlace, together

with geometric layout, holding the motifs together. This differentiation was a contribution of Celtic art embraced in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria (Cramp 1995:6).²⁰

The most celebrated of the illuminated manuscripts in the Irish world are the Book of Kells and the Lindisfarne Gospels. The Lindisfarne Gospels are dated to 700 and belong to the same general region and era of the Ruthwell Cross. The Lindisfarne Gospels combine Celtic elements with fragments from two other traditions, Germanic and Mediterranean. The Celtic style is seen in design of initials and cross carpet-pages borrowed from Insular metalworking, particularly Celtic metalwork. The Anglo-Saxon or Germanic element is seen in the prevalent use of animal motifs. And the Mediterranean knot work and interlace patterns tie the overall artistic picture together (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:173-74; M. Brown 2003:384-408).

Other examples of material evidence of ancient Irish Christianity are ‘the standing crosses that despite the perils of war and weather have kept their stations for centuries.’ More than 30 of these are left in Ireland, ranging in height from three to seven metres. There also may be found a few comparable monuments of the same era in Scotland and England. ‘Perhaps the best worth attention among these is the Ruthwell (Dumfriesshire) Cross, now dated in the late eight century’ (McNeill 1974:128).

From these examples of Celtic influence scattered across Northumbria, I now adduce evidence of Celtic themes or influences on the particular monument, the Ruthwell Cross. The following list of evidence is not meant to be exhaustive, simply representative:

1. The panel of the blessing of Christ upon the animals on the RC shows an aspect of Christ strongly consonant with Celtic eremitical monasticism (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:211).

²⁰ Celtic manuscripts included aesthetic motifs like carpetpages, curvilinear script, and majuscules. Michelle Brown, however, believes that the Northumbrian vinescrolls were symbolic of the Eucharist and often were inhabited by beasts that bore symbolic meanings (1991:58-60).

2. Paul and Anthony breaking bread may be an allusion to the Irish ritual of *cofractio*, or joint consecration. This ceremony was part of the liturgy and tableau of Iona. It was cited in a hymn on the Eucharist in the Antiphonary at Bangor, ‘*quando communicarent sacerdotes*,’ that associates the *fractio* with Paul and Anthony’s loaf. *Cofractio* does not occur in the Roman rite—maybe it comes from the Antonine Fathers—and may be considered a minor heterodoxy of Irish monasticism; it was not challenged specifically at Whitby (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:213; Ó Carragáin 2005:261).

3. Scholars have identified the monastic tonsure on the sculpted figures of Paul and Anthony as the Celtic tonsure. If the dating of the RC is accurate at 750, then this example of the older Insular custom lived on nearly 100 years after the decision of Whitby that officially approved the Roman tonsure (Cramp 1995:13).

4. Writing about the artwork of the Lindisfarne Gospels, scholar Michelle Brown describes the Matthew carpet page and notes:

The use of bird and beast forms to articulate the cross may be compared, as we have already seen, to the use of inhabited vine scrolls, a motif of early Christian Mediterranean derivation, symbolizing the partaking of all Creation of the Eucharistic Tree of Life. (2003:325)

Finally she links the Lindisfarne art with the stone art of nearby crosses. ‘Such vine-scrolls may be found adorning the shafts of near-contemporary sculptures of Northumbrian workmanship, the Ruthwell and Bewcastle crosses’ (M. Brown 1999:326).

5. Was the Ruthwell poet inspired by an Irish prayer that risked patripassianism, the heresy that God the Father suffered on the cross with the Son? The prayer was prescribed for recital daily at noon, the sixth hour, and recalled when Christ ascended the cross.²¹

²¹ The prayer, part of the Irish Antiphonary at Bangor, reads: ‘Almighty and eternal God, who has done great things for us, who at the sixth hour ascended the [Holy] Cross and brought light to the darkness of

6. Finally, the Celtic appreciation of pagan poetry may be on view here since this dramatic account of the cross in the *DR* differs from the biblical accounts of the Crucifixion. Some Christians saw a conflict between the Bards' expressions of Christian faith and their creativity in storytelling and use of language. Therefore, they viewed the Celtic bards suspiciously.²² Clare Stancliffe, writing about Bede, comments,

The crucial thing to remember is that the Irish were the primary teachers of Christian Northumbria; and, as such, they introduced not simply texts, but texts within a context of Christian teaching and learning. (2010:81)

Neuman de Vegvar asserts that the Strathclyde region, which included Ruthwell, was more resistant than the rest of Celtic-converted Northumbria to Roman orthodoxy. This was due to a preponderance of nonconforming Irish clergy living in an area remotely removed from Roman places of influence. The life of Saint Kentigern (518-603), the major missionary of the Strathclyde region, was of a model hermit saint. Perhaps the RC commemorated his work. Was his life the tacit subject at Ruthwell? (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:220).²³

7.5.2 Roman and Mediterranean Influences

Pope Gregory's Roman mission to England established a school at Canterbury, a non-Celtic monastic tradition, and the missionary enterprise begun by Augustine in 597. In the decades that followed the influence of Roman theology, liturgy, and order grew

the world: in the same way graciously enlighten our hearts.' The Antiphony is dated at the end of the seventh century (680-691). Bangor lies due west of Ruthwell, linked by a simple sea journey from Bangor to Whithorn (Ó Carragáin 2005:262).

²² Richter describes a prose preface to the *Amra Coluim Chille*, regarded as one of the earliest poems in the Irish language to have survived. The poem is believed to have been composed shortly after Columba's death (597). The preface refers to a public gathering held at Druim Cett in 575 at which Columba, abbot of Iona since 563, spoke out in favour of the Irish poets who were facing expulsion from Ireland (Richter 1994:222).

²³ According to hagiographic sources, Kentigern visited Pope Gregory who freed him from Episcopal authority, and Kentigern met and exchanged staves with Columba. Columba's staff was kept at Whitby as a holy relic (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:220).

gradually until the synodical victory at Whitby (664) made Rome's ascendancy official.

Some of the Roman influences seen in the *DR* and the *RC* are described below:

1. The cult of the 'true cross' originated in the days of Rome's emperor Constantine and his mother Helena. Constantine's vision of the *chi rho* symbol before the battle at Milvian Bridge in 312 proved significant for him and the empire. Rufinus's *History*, which was known to Bede, helped establish the symbol as a victory cross or token of victory. A stone slab at Jarrow appears to bear the inscription: 'In this unique sign was life restored to the world.' The sign carved is clearly a cross (Ó Carragáin 2005:232).

Constantine's adoption of the cross as the *signum* of Christianity as well as his battle banner paved the way for his mother to seek the historical crucifixion cross as miracle-evoking relic. Helena persuaded her son the emperor to sponsor state trips to the holy land to seek the 'true cross' and other relics from biblical times. One trip reportedly unearthed the cross and pieces of holy wood were dispersed throughout the empire (Orton et al 2007:172ff). The Shrine of the True Cross and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre were established by Constantine and his sons (Herren and Brown 2002:195-7).

The veneration of the cross on Good Friday was an eastern devotional practice of Constantinople in the seventh century. Contacts between Constantinople and Rome in this period were close. Many of the popes were Greek but spoke Latin as well. Eastern piety celebrated a devotion to the relics of the cross and that devotion made its way to Rome in Good Friday celebrations. By the seventh century, several important relics of the cross were housed in Rome. The Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross gained approval from Pope Sergius I (687-701) when he gifted the Lateran with a piece of the true cross he discovered at Saint Peter's grave.²⁴

²⁴ Ó Carragáin provides a description of Sergius's discovery and references to 'the Feast' are in Sergius's official biography. This is the earliest surviving official mention of the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross in the Western Church (2005:230).

In 679 the Anglo-Saxon clerics Benedict Biscop and Ceolfrith returned from Rome to the newly founded monastery of Saint Peter's, Wearmouth. At Rome they had acquired books for the library and icons to adorn the liturgy. Biscop persuaded Pope Agatho to allow John the Archcantor to come with them to teach the English the Roman liturgy. In the time of Pope Sergius, Hwaetbert, the future abbot of Wearmouth and Jarrow (716) journeyed to Rome where he heard news of the find by Sergius. Bede knew the Sergius 'cross story' as well and told it in an appendix to his work, *De Temporum Rationale*. Thus, the cult of the cross in Constantinople and Rome made its way to Northumbria by the end of the seventh century.²⁵

This cross narrative in Anglo-Saxon circles retained particular currency because of the poem by Cynewulf, *Elene*. The poem tells of Helena and the search for the true cross. The poem appears in the Vercelli manuscript alongside the DR. The cross cult owed its popularity to various factors. Among these were the power of Constantine's vision, Sergius's discovery, the Good Friday traditions, Oswald's story (recounted below as an Anglo-Saxon influence), visits to the Holy Land, the poem *Elene*, the liturgies of monasteries, pilgrimages to stone crosses, and images of the cross on Insular manuscripts.

2. The Roman liturgy, especially texts read during Holy Week, emphasised the centrality of the cross and the Crucifixion. Ó Carragáin (2005:180ff) argues that the narrative of the Crucifixion and the Ruthwell iconography both reflect aspects of the Good Friday celebrations at Ruthwell in the early or middle eighth century. The ceremonies of this period placed Good Friday in the perspective of the Paschal *triduum*, culminating in the holy day of Easter.

²⁵ Dickins and Ross suggest the gift of a piece of the true cross from Pope Marinus to Alfred (885) was an occasion for a revision of the DR poem. They suggest further that the sliver cross reliquary (Brussels Cross) contains the second of the pieces that Pope Marinus sent to Alfred. The reliquary is inscribed with phrases from the DR poem in the West Saxon form of Old English.

‘Perhaps the most exciting manifestation of the Cross in Old English literature is that in the *DR*, which describes the cross as a still but dynamic representation of, and window to, the events of Good Friday’ (Bedingfield 2002:138-9). A number of critics have attempted to describe parallels between the *DR* and the *Adoratio*. Howard Patch discusses the relationship between the vision and the jewel-adorned cross in the poem and marshals evidence for a link to the jewelled and possibly red crosses in England (1960:43-72).

3. It is likely that the influence of Pope Gregory’s strategy of mission enabled a Ruthwell Cross to be constructed and appreciated by a mixed audience of monks, nuns, and laypersons. Gregory’s strategy that evinces sympathy for the ‘heathen English’ is discussed by R.A. Markus in his essay ‘Gregory the Great and A Papal Missionary Strategy’ (Markus 1970:29-38). Bede cites correspondence between Gregory and his envoy to England, Augustine. Gregory replies to Augustine’s question about encountering different customs among the English.

My brother, you know the customs of the Roman Church in which, of course, you were brought up. But it is my wish that if you have found any customs in the Roman or the Gaulish Church or any other Church which may be more pleasing to Almighty God, you should make a careful selection of them and sedulously teach the church of the English, which is still new in the faith, what you have been able to gather from other Churches. For things are not to be loved for the sake of a place, but places are to be loved for the sake of their good things. Therefore choose from every individual Church whatever things are devout, religious and right. And when you have collected these as it were into one bundle, see that the minds of the English grow accustomed to it. (Bede 1990:81-3)

Around 600 Gregory wrote to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles, censuring his destruction of images and proffered further advice, in the form of a letter to Mellittus, to not destroy idols but to sprinkle them with holy water. This accords with the advice of Bishop Daniel of Winchester given to Boniface (Bede 1990:30).

It was a mistake, Daniel wrote, to provoke the pagans and to remove from them, with force, the objects to which they were attached. It was better to ask them questions about their gods, to inquire about their origins, their seemingly human attributes, their relationship with the beginning of the world, and in so doing elicit such contradictions and absurdities from their answers that they would become confused and ashamed. Rational arguments would convince the pagans of their

errors more successfully than the destruction of their sacred shrines and its effects would be more lasting. (Talbot 1970:49)

I date *DR* as text and inscription circa 750 CE. This date follows Gregory's advice to Serenus and Mellitus (600) by a century and occurs a mere generation after the year of Daniel's advice to Boniface (723).

4. The use of Latin for the RC inscriptions and the sculpted Christian symbols reflect Roman influence although both Latin and the symbols also represent Christian themes in a wider Mediterranean sense and throughout the empire.

5. Bruce-Mitford has postulated that the four Evangelist portraits of the Lindisfarne Gospels have a single source—the gospels volume of Cassidorus's *Novem Codices*. Cassidorus, with links to Rome and Mediterranean influences, founded a monastery in his retirement years at Vivarium (537). The panels and vine-scrolls on the RC show the extensive use of imported Mediterranean models, probably imported ivory devotional panels and book covers (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:206). But the understanding and acceptance by the Northumbrians of human and realistic figural sculpture and such Mediterranean motifs as late classical vine-scroll was the result of wider ecclesiastical contacts in the late seventh century (Cramp 1999:6).

7.5.3 Anglo-Saxon Influences and Reception

The influences of Christianity in translated forms reach Northumbria from Roman/Mediterranean and Celtic sources. My study of the *DR* and its historical backgrounds leads me to recognise distinctive features of the Anglo-Saxon Christianity that emerges during the age of Bede. Northumbrian Christianity displays elements of these influences and it also reflects Saxon indigenous elements. The reception and reconfiguration of these assimilated influences in new forms include:

1. The Old English poetry of the *DR* evinces originality of form and an extraordinary emotional intensity. Many Anglo-Saxon poems may have existed first in oral form. They used both alliteration and stressed syllables. Elaine Treharne links alliterative verse to the poetry of all the Germanic tribes and identifies Caedmon's *Hymn* as the first example of such alliterative poetry in English; moreover, Caedmon made use of the Germanic heroic form and combined it with Christian devotion (Treharne 2000:xix). The *DR*, also evincing the hero motif and biblical imagery, likely belongs to the age of *Beowulf*. Old English poems such as *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*, and *The Banished Wife's Lament* highlight persons as speakers. *The Dream of the Rood* stands apart because the speech is given to an inanimate object, not a person. 'To endow the Cross with the power of locution was to use a device of unexampled effectiveness in making vivid an event about which, for all devout Christians, the entire history of the world revolved' (Schlauch 1940:24). The Anglo-Saxon literary use of riddles may be at the heart of the speaking cross.²⁶ The riddle technique in the *DR* may have been amplified on the *RC* if the runic text was mysteriously unknown to most observers.

2. Stone crosses may be found in Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and England dating from as early as the seventh century. These crosses are emblematic of how important 'the cross' had become as Christian symbol ranging from Gaul and the Mediterranean region into the larger Insular region. Stone crosses both carved and decorated proliferated in Northumbria in the eighth century and were used as monuments in several regions of Anglo-Saxon England (Collingwood 1927:29-31). Why did stone crosses seem to have had special significance in Northumbria? One prototypical example was the story of the wooden cross of Oswald before the Battle of Heavenfield.

The place is still shown today and is held in great veneration where Oswald, when he was about to engage in battle, set up the sign of the holy cross and, on bended knees, prayed God to send

²⁶ Swanton explains that the Anglo-Saxon riddle featured an 'enigmatic object describing itself in oblique terms' and may have been linked to the technique of *prosopoeia* in which an inanimate object speaks (Swanton 1987:67). See also Ó Carragáin 2005:332.

heavenly aid to His worshippers in their dire need. In fact it is related that when a cross had been hastily made and the hole dug in which it was to stand, he seized the cross himself in the ardour of his faith, and held it upright with both hands until the soldiers had heaped up the earth and fixed it position. (Bede 1990:215)

Bede is likely to have gathered this story from the monks at Hexham who kept a vigil annually for the soul of King Oswald and who built a church and not a cross monument on the site of the battle (Orton et al. 2007:171).

The practice of portraying the Godhead by means of abstract or symbolic substitution was reinforced within multiple Christian traditions from an early date. The *crux gemmata* (jewelled cross) and the illuminated Gospelbook serve as the embodiment of Christ in material art. This embodiment is seen also in the mosaics of Ravenna and receives endorsement in the Roman cult of the cross practices. Images and texts combine in an ‘electrifying symbiosis in the details of the Lindisfarne Gospels’ in which the crosses and adorned words embody the Godhead and present the physical embodiment of the Word (M. Brown 2003:75). Paul Szarmach argues cogently that the *DR* is significant as an example of *ekphrasis*, ‘the verbal representation of the visual’ (Szarmach 2007:267).

3. Anglo-Saxon Christianity developed a distinct ecclesiastical structure under the leadership of Archbishop Theodore, a Greek-speaking monk from Tarsus. He was appointed to Canterbury and served from 669 to 690. Along with his African colleague, Hadrian, abbot of Saint Augustine’s, Theodore established a school at Canterbury. The school reflected some of Theodore’s appreciation of Mediterranean practices and established a curriculum featuring poetic composition, computus, astronomy, and the study of scripture. This curriculum was adopted at the twin monasteries of Wearmouth and Jarrow where Bede lived and studied (M. Brown 2004:8).

4. Symbols of creation such as the archer and the raptor on the monument at RC may compose a secular hunt scene. Eagles and other raptors appear frequently on Anglo-Saxon coins. The inclusion of pre-Christian mythological material was common in Irish

and in English pre-Viking period crosses. Of course the archer may refer to Psalm 90:5 in association with the eagle image in Psalm 90:4 (Neuman de Vegvar 1987:214).

5. In the *DR* the paramount symbol taken from creation is the tree. The tree becomes the rood and an instrument of death, but also may be linked to the Tree of Life. Helen Tampierova argues ‘the tree’ is one of the most widespread of religious symbols in human history. She cites the *axis mundi* of the Germano-Celtic mythology as the pre-Christian influence and context of the dreaming poet. The *syclicre treow* of the *DR* (line 4b, ‘best of trees’) does bear an echo of Yggdrasil, the great ash tree of Norse mythology (Tampierova 2007:47). Perhaps the poet is deliberately recalling his pagan past but converting it and giving the *treow* a Christian sensibility as it finds fulfillment in the cross of Christ (Guite 2010:39).

7.6 Integrating Translation Motifs and Tacit Influences

These three sets of clues suggest that the *DR* in its manuscript form and in its carved inscription upon the RC reflect multiple streams of cultural Christianities. The history of eighth and ninth century Northumbria indicate that monks from the Celtic world of Iona and Lindisfarne shared influence with another monastic stream emanating from Rome and represented by Gregory the Great and Augustine of Kent and Canterbury. The cross monument was ‘majestically Roman’ in its carvings and Latin inscriptions. The monument presented both the lordship of Christ and monastic devotion in the figure of Mary Magdalene as she bent to wipe his feet with her hair (Brown 2003:231). The vinescrolls and creation images suggest a wider world reaching east to the Mediterranean. The *DR* poem, on the other hand, is distinctively vernacular with its Old English uncials.

One of the translation motifs identified in Chapter Four is primarily the insight of Lamin Sanneh. He contends that Christianity translated stimulates the vernacular (1989:52-3). How might have a religious poem in the vernacular tongue of the eighth century Anglo-Saxons stimulated religious renewal, vernacular pride, cross-cultural dialogue or reciprocity in mission? Evidence of missional exchange was part and parcel of the Northumbrian religious landscape. The Celtic *prergrini* traveled and took their monastic faith with them. Monasteries shared manuscripts since they valued learning and constantly were adding volumes to their scriptoriums. The Synod of Whitby in 664 bears witness to the power of exchange coming to a point of conflict as Roman and Celtic interpretations clashed. In the *DR* the cult of the True Cross had traveled from the east and found a new home. The ability to write in poetic verses was the skill of the noble or the ecclesiastic (P. Brown 2003:231). As a Northumbrian religious poem, the *DR* exhibits biblical insight, visionary drama and a royal cast due to the hero motif. Perhaps the most compelling evidence of the growth of vernacular expressions of the gospel is the heritage of Bede. He worshipped and produced the *Ecclesiastical History* in Latin but was busy translating the Gospel of John into English when he died in 735.

Another translation motif that informs our understanding of the *DR* as a missional translation is Bediako's emphasis on recognising primal or indigenous elements. In the section (7.5.3) that details Anglo-Saxon cultural particulars, the reader can pay attention to the poet's and sculptor's indigenous materials and discern an emerging pattern of indigenous Christianity. Two examples are instructive. Stone slabs or standing stones dotted the medieval landscape of Ireland and Britain and antedate the coming of Christianity. Were they memorials, tombs, or used to calculate astronomical observations or stationed as boundary markers between geographical boundaries? Some singular stones in Ireland were called *ogham* stones because of the ancient Irish

(*ogham*) inscriptions.²⁷ In the seventh century and beyond crosses were set up as memorials or to mark a place of prayer. The first crosses were constructed of wood but by the eighth century, most were made of stone (Mayr-Harting 1991:247-8). The eighth century Ruthwell Cross, an elaborate mix of sculpture and inscriptions plus Latin and Old English, represents indigenous material culture ‘translated’ or converted for Christian and missional purposes.

A second example of a primal influence transformed into an element of the Northumbrian gospel is the image of the tree. I cited earlier Helen Tampierova who identifies ‘the tree’ as a prominent religious symbol in human history (Tampierova 2007:47). The *sylicre treow* of the *DR* (line 4b, ‘best of trees’) becomes the rood and an instrument of death, but also may be linked to the Mediterranean symbol of the Tree of Life. I believe the poet is recalling his pagan heritage but converting the image for devotional and theological purposes. In the *DR* poem, ‘the tree as cross’ is a speaking cross and can function as a missional symbol as well in calling persons to faith and devotion.

Polanyi describes his theory of tacit knowing in several ways. His tacit triad indicates that a knowing subject (A) brings a tacit particular (B) upon a focal meaning (C). For example, a witness or translator brings an emphasis on the cross of Christ, the monastic life, or both into a developing focal pattern that bears witness to Christianity for Northumbrian converts. Polanyi also describes this process of knowing as the work of integrating tacit particulars into a focal pattern. How might the earliest readers of the *DR* have interpreted various particulars in the poem to garner an overall meaning or message and in that message learned about the Christian gospel?

²⁷ Most Ogham inscriptions date from the sixth century although some date from both the fifth and seventh centuries as well. Ogham was used for inscriptions on memorial stones of the dead of the Irish ruling class. Although most of these stones are in Ireland some are attested in Wales and Britain. The British stones usually carry identical inscriptions in Latin (Richter 1988:30-1).

Limiting ourselves to the manuscript poem, let us identify several tacit particulars related to Christology:

1. Christ is a willing hero who strips and mounts the cross.
2. The tree becomes the rood, or cross, and suffers in inflicting pain to a victim.
3. The tree/rood/cross must participate in evil and become an unwilling instrument of death.
4. The cross shines as a beacon in glory.
5. Old English language points to provenance and culture.

These particulars combine to form a pattern that is coherently Christological and cruciform. I conclude that the tacit particular of 'Christ the hero' is informed and interpreted by the suffering of the cross. And the tacit particular of the dramatized 'speaking cross' leads to consideration of the victim as hero as well. The composite picture means that the cross cannot be understood without considering what kind of role Jesus assumed in his suffering. And Jesus cannot be understood apart from his suffering and death on the cross. Jesus is pictured not only as saviour and hero but also as exemplar.

7.7 The Missional Portrait of Christ in *The Dream of the Rood*

Jaroslav Pelikan's masterful portrait of Jesus as seen by followers throughout history is titled *Jesus through the Centuries: His Place in the History of Culture*. Pelikan makes the point that his use of 'culture' is not a reference to the works of poets and artists (high culture), but that he has in mind the discipline of anthropology. How has Jesus been understood and portrayed in various eras of history and society across time and across space? Pelikan's question resonates with an observation Andrew Walls makes about a phrase in Ephesians 4:13. Walls envisions the various 'images of Christ'

informing a visual mosaic compilation that helps the church contemplate ‘the full stature of Christ’ (Pelikan 1985:7; Walls 2002:78). Pelikan’s book identifies 18 images of Jesus Christ that belong to the first 20 centuries of Christian history. Two of these portraits are particularly germane for understanding Northumbrian Christianity in the eighth century: ‘Christ Crucified’ and ‘The Monk Who Rules the World’ (Pelikan 1985:95, 109).

Michael W. Herren and Shirley Ann Brown, in a work about ‘Christ images’ in Celtic Christianity, identify five conceptualisations of Christ both textual and representational: Christ as the perfect or ideal monk; the heroic or militant Christ and harrower of hell; Christ as judge; Christ the wonder worker; and the crucified Christ (Herren and Brown 2002:137-85, 234-76).²⁸

They argue that both the RC and the Book of Kells present a picture of Christ as the ideal monk. The sculpted images of beasts on the RC and in the Book of Kells recall the desert (Mark 1:13 and Psalm 90:13). Likewise the image of John the Baptist, who lived on locusts and wild honey, also reminds the viewer of the desert. The additional figures of the hermit saints, Anthony and Paul of Thebes, sharing bread delivered by the ravens, recalls the desert and the Eucharist.²⁹ The Mary and Martha panels on the RC invoke the tension between the contemplative and the servant ideals within monasticism.

The many figural scenes on the RC suggest an appreciation of the monastic life with its emphasis on asceticism and self-denial. Such a life easily invokes the example of Christ and may be seen as a tacit reminder that the Christian life in Insular Northumbria was best lived in monastic devotion. The dominant image of Christ seen on the RC and

²⁸ The first half of the book examines theological matters in Britain and Ireland, particularly, the heresies of Arianism, Pelagianism, Monothelitism, and those whose Easter observances were deemed irregular. The second part of the book examines the images of Christ. Both monasticism and Celtic features are seen as background to the development of these ‘Christ images.’

²⁹ Herren and Brown point out that in the Celtic monastic tradition the Eucharist is seen as a reward for the monastic and ascetic withdrawal from life en route to moral perfection (2002:258). Cramp has observed that the monkish figures wear the Celtic tonsure in which their hair is cut high above the ears (Cramp 1995:13).

in the *DR* is Christ crucified. The monument pre-eminently is a stone cross that presents a crucifixion poem fragment in which the cross speaks as a character.

The *DR* and *RC* portraits of Christ both compare and contrast in striking ways to another poetic account of Christ as saviour that belongs to the same general era. The *Heliand*, commonly referred to as ‘The Saxon Gospel,’ was written in Old Saxon. According to translator G. Ronald Murphy, ‘The *Heliand* is an epic poem of the life of Christ, written in alliterative verse, and stands as the first epic work of German literature.’ Murphy guesses that the author was probably a monk of Fulda, Corvey, or Werden. It originally was untitled and has been dated as early as 830 CE. The title *Heliand* means ‘saviour’ in Old Saxon (Murphy 1989:11-12).

Like the *Heliand* portrayal, the *DR* presents Christ as a hero prepared to do battle in his redemptive work on the cross. Passages from the second part of the *DR* poem, all spoken by the cross, establish Christ as the ‘lord of mankind,’ ‘the young hero’ or ‘warrior,’ and He approaches the cross with eagerness, and the crucifixion with resolution, as though it were a battle. Indeed, it is called a ‘mighty struggle’ — ‘*miclan gewinne*’ (1. 65a).³⁰ The hero motif, however, must be interpreted in light of the speaking cross and the dreamer’s reflections. I contend that the poet artfully contrasts the heroic image of Christ with a picture of the cross as the suffering servant and sacrificial victim.³¹

7.8 Conclusion

³⁰ See Patten 1968:388 and Cherniss 1973:242.

³¹ Bruce Mitchell (1992:257) suggests that the *DR* fuses Germanic heroic tradition and the Christian view of sacrifice thus ‘resolving the pagan-Christian tension in Anglo-Saxon culture.’ Swanton (1996:60), on the other hand, argues that the heroic elements are ‘largely allusive and a matter of mere vocabulary.’ He asserts that the poet emphasises Christ’s redemptive work rather than that of a victor prince. Paul Fiddes, following R. Woolf’s reasoning, describes the Christological picture in the *DR* as a duality reminiscent of the Chalcedonian understanding of Christ’s two natures; hence the poem features suffering and triumph, humanity and divinity, the cross and the crucified. See Fiddes 2013:14-18 and Woolf 1958:137-53.

The Anglo-Saxon portraits of Christ presented both in *The Dream of the Rood* and upon the Ruthwell Cross, display a counter-balancing set of images. The Celts nurtured the image of the perfect monk (hermit or *peregrini*) who embraces the ascetic lifestyle of religious devotion. The image may be extended to include the devoted disciple as a type of the sacrificial victim on the cross. Within the Saxon tradition the picture of the warrior as hero also is prominent in the *DR* poem. Jesus on the cross is *Christus victor* but his heroism is to defeat sin and Satan as one who lays down his life (John 10:11, 15). The balance is achieved dramatically with the eager hero mounting the cross as victor and the cross or rood submitting as victim and sacrifice. The hero and the cross together give the reader the full portrait of Jesus both divine and human. Michelle Brown describes this portrait in vivid terms.

The cross becomes a living organism, as in the near contemporaneous Old English poem, the *Dream of the Rood* ... portion inscribed on RC in Germanic runic characters. In the poem the cross finds voice and tells of its humiliation, agony, and glorification in partaking of the Lord's passion. The cross is equally vibrant, tortured and ennobled, as expressed by the throng of life it contains. (M. Brown 2003:327)

Brown, (2003:53) claims the Lindisfarne Gospels were made at Lindisfarne during a period (710-721) when Bishop Eadfrith and Bede were collaborating in determining the future of the cult of Saint Cuthbert as part of a broader program for northern Britain. A scenario for production of the Lindisfarne Gospels might have been the collaboration between Lindisfarne and Wearmouth/Jarrow. Wearmouth/Jarrow has been described aptly as 'an island of romanitas in a Hiberno-Saxon sea' (M. Brown 2003:53).

The three translation features gleaned from the study of linguistic sources in Chapter Four are:

1. Similarity and difference that refers to ontology and translation.
2. Transformation means conversion within the translation process.
3. Multiplicity means polyglossic or multilingual achievement.

This case study particularly represents the polyglossic feature.³² The *DR* represents the creative efforts of a translator who inhabited multiple cultural worlds. The Celtic and Roman and Anglo-Saxon influences have been noted. The narrative of the Crucifixion preserved in both *The Dream of the Rood* and upon the Ruthwell Cross monument reflects a synthesis of cultural influences from Roman/Mediterranean and Celtic sources.³³ Neuman de Vegvar has identified three modes of acculturation in the Northumbrian Renaissance: assimilative, emulative, and synthesizing (1987:275-7). These three modes of acculturation are similar to the three stages translation offered by Andrew Walls.

Walls' initial or 'missionary' stage occurs when missionaries bring new ideas and introduce new practices into a region. So when Biscop, Ceolfrith, and Wilfrid brought art and books and liturgical habits from Rome to Northumbria, these elements of a tradition were emulated and then assimilated. Similarly, when Aidan came and established Lindisfarne, he brought distinctly Irish attributes that were introduced and assimilated into Northumbria. The second stage is the 'convert' stage. The Synod of Whitby marks a conversion of Irish practices to the more universal Roman standard, particularly the shape of tonsure and Easter dating. Northumbrian Christians were bid by the king's decision to emulate Roman practice, thus converting to the new way. The third stage is termed 'refiguration' by Walls. This captures the notion of synthesis or combination when old and new ways are fashioned into a third way. Eventually one sees gospel practices in Northumbria as distinctly Anglo-Saxon and neither Irish nor

³² This feature as I describe it has two dimensions. Micro-multiplicity, the first dimension, means that the translator must inhabit more than one world. Indeed, the translator must pay attention to the source, witness, and receptor settings and must speak more than one language and think in more than one set of categories. The other dimension, macro-multiplicity, takes notice of an accumulating body of cross-cultural translations, interpretations of ideas, narratives, and performances that comprises the Christian gospel. Thus the church universal reflects a growing macro-multiplicity of gospel expressions and is informed by a cumulative set of understandings of Jesus the Christ.

³³ Ó Carragáin (2005:57-8) also argues that the Ruthwell Cross reflects an integrated local theology or a synthesis of various influences. He proposes that a Celtic vs. Roman approach to understanding Northumbria gives way to an irenic and inclusive theology, 'embracing English, Irish, British and Roman ideas.' He sometimes uses the term 'Celtic' to include both Irish and British elements. He also posits a Ruthwell community.

Roman. The poem called *The Dream of the Rood* in both manuscript and stone is a unique expression of Anglo-Saxon ‘refiguration’ or Northumbrian ‘local theology.’ I suspect that the Northumbrian receptors played an important role in the assimilation of the gospel tradition. I have mentioned Bede who used Latin for his scholarship but died while translating John’s Gospel into English and reciting Anglo-Saxon Christian poems (P. Brown 2003:216). The reconfiguration of the gospel message in the *DR* poem shows a creative apprehension of the gospel by the *DR* poet. The cloistered poet likely was an indigenous Anglo-Saxon disciple familiar with both Rome liturgies and Celtic songs. I note that the scriptural translations behind the *DR* effort are second order achievements since the sources are Roman and Celtic rather than the Hebrew and Greek scriptures.³⁴ The monks’ Bible would have been the Latin Vulgate and they may have the Creed in view as a source as well.³⁵

Historian Charles-Edwards succinctly summarises the Ruthwell Cross translation:

The combination of the two scripts and the two languages echoed those bilingual stones ... erected by the Irish in western Britain. Imitation is unlikely; instead the parallel reveals a similar cultural situation, with a vernacular being given sufficient honour to be admitted, alongside Latin, to the grandest medium, stone, the distinction between the two languages being reinforced by the further distinction between two scripts. A new English elite deployed within its Christian message the scripts and languages of both the Roman and the Germanic past. (2000:322)

So who might have written the poem and where is its provenance? Paul Meyvaert guesses that a Northumbrian monk conceived the Ruthwell Cross. This monk or monks would have been brought up in the Lindisfarne tradition yet familiar with the works of

³⁴ M. Brown (2006:175) indicates that around 950-70 Aldred made the oldest known translation of the gospels into English as a word-by-word translation and gloss between the lines of the Lindisfarne Gospels (originally from 720). An earlier effort was Bede’s attempt to translate the Gospel of John into English on his deathbed in 735.

³⁵ Anthony Grasso argues that the theology and structure in the *DR* find their source in the Nicene Creed. ‘Like the Creed, the poem moves from the concept of God as Light through the death, resurrection and Second Coming of Christ’ (Grasso 1991:23ff). Other arguments about the *DR* locate its influence as the Roman liturgy. I see both the Creed and the Liturgy to be secondary influences. I contend that the biblical narrative is primary as source even if the *DR* poet’s Bible was Latin and he had no access to Hebrew and Greek.

Bede (Meyvaert in Cassidy 1992:95-166).³⁶ That conjecture is a solid hypothesis. I offer a further consideration to that thesis: a group of monks was responsible for the creation and construction of the Ruthwell Cross and employed local workers to get the job done. A disciple of Lindisfarne, working earlier and independently, was responsible for writing the verses on the Crucifixion. This poet sought to express his faith in an exercise of devotion that signalled missional aspirations as well. In the tree's speech we read, 'Now I command you, my beloved warrior, that you tell this vision to men' (Lines 95-6).

Our translation-as-mission construct bids us to evaluate how effectively the poem communicates Jesus the Christ. The Christology represented is definitely within the scope of catholic orthodoxy. This crucifixion poem has as its subject the redemptive work of Christ and the instrument of that salvific sacrifice. In many ways the *DR* in both manuscript form and as inscribed upon the Ruthwell Cross manifests a remarkable balance of source and receptor elements. One important gospel element, however, is less prominent than one would expect from a statement that otherwise suggests Nicene Christology.

The 'gospel element' associated with Easter is treated obliquely in the poem. Any reference to the Resurrection is muted at best; so is it sufficient to help a reader understand Christ's victory on the cross? There is a victory noted in the *DR* but it seems a triumph of *kenosis* (self-emptying). Good Friday, the Lord's Ascension and the Second Coming all are featured more prominently in the poem than the Resurrection.³⁷

³⁶ M. Brown (2006:197) comments, 'This ...example of Christian poetry is couched in the form of a Celto-Germanic epic recitations of the mead hall (Bede confessed to a weakness for his people's poetic tradition). Christ is presented as a young warrior/hero who wins the ultimate victory over Death on behalf of his people. The cross that is forced to bear him aloft speaks, its voice assuming the tone of a woman—a mother or lover—and recalling earlier love poems. But here the genre acquires a new universal poignancy in which all of creation, including its flora, grieves for the loss of its beloved Creator and experiences the sublime joy of reunion. It is in effect an Insular Creed.'

³⁷ Ó Carragáin (2005:321-24) identifies three triumphal *adventus* exhibited in liturgical chants: Incarnation as Christ emerges to run his course ('hastening with great valour', line 34a), Good Friday—Easter as a second triumphal entry, and Ascension, his triumphal return to heaven. In the *DR* Christ's life

Is the Messiah's victory the covering of sin or is it also the bringing of life? John's Gospel emphatically depicts Jesus as the life-giver, for example, abundant life in John 10, resurrection and the life in John 11, and eternal life in John 3. *The Dream of the Rood* emphasises the cross of Jesus and therefore his atoning sacrifice. Perhaps this poet's emphasis belongs to an early stage of the medieval tradition represented better by the crucifix than the empty cross.³⁸ The missional translation construct alerts us to notice this missing dimension.

The Anglo-Saxon monastic Christianity on display in the *DR* manifests the theological content and even some of the phrasing found in the Nicene Creed (Grasso 1991:33-4). The poem's Christology balances both the humanity and divinity of Christ though its emphasis is on the soteriology achieved upon the cross. The tree as shining beacon in the vision signals triumph and glory. The poem exhibits Christological elements in Old English vernacular language. This poetic portrait of Jesus Christ represents the expansion of the Christian church in Anglo-Saxon Northumbria and reflects a new translation—a new portrait of Christ to be set alongside the Roman and Celtic portraits of the eighth century.

was summarised as a successful expedition (150-56) reminiscent of the bridegroom running his course pictured in Psalm 18/19:5.

³⁸ Swanton traces the early history of figural crucifixion scenes beginning with a fifth-century ivory casket and a cypress panel from the sixth-century doors of St Sabina in Rome. Cf. Swanton 1987:53-6.

CHAPTER EIGHT

A Contemporary Retelling of the Prodigal Parable for Arabic Eyes and Ears

8.1 Introduction

In this case study I evaluate a contemporary effort to present the Christian Gospels missionally to persons of Arabic and Muslim backgrounds. I consider two associated storytelling efforts that are the work of New Testament scholar, Kenneth E. Bailey. Bailey has earned degrees in Arabic language and literature, systematic theology, and Biblical studies. Ordained by the Presbyterian Church (USA), Bailey spent his childhood in Egypt; from 1955 until 1995 he taught in seminaries and institutes in Egypt, Lebanon, Jerusalem, and Cyprus. His scholarship gives considerable weight to eastern Christianity's ancient literature and draws insights from Middle Eastern culture and rhetorical styles.¹

The first presentation is the feature length film, *Finding the Lost*, a story that weaves together a retelling of the three parables in Luke 15. The film was shot on location in and around Cairo and released in 1997. The actors are professionals in the Arabic world and the film was produced in Arabic with English subtitles. The film has been translated into many languages including Urdu, Bangladeshi, Sylhete (Bangladesh), and several Afghan and Tajik languages.²

The second presentation is the book, *The Cross and the Prodigal: Luke 15 Through the Eyes of Middle Eastern Peasants*. The first half of the book is a brief commentary on Luke 15. The second part is a one-act play, *Two Sons Have I Not*. It features four

¹ Bailey prepared for his work of interpreting Middle Eastern culture by intensive Arabic study early in his career and years of living in Egyptian villages. Bailey's father, Ewing M. Bailey, served as a missionary in Egypt with the United Presbyterian Church, North America from 1935 until 1957 (Skreslet 2008:219; Lorimer 2007:221).

² See the publications list of Kenneth Bailey's work at www.shenango.org/PDF/Bailey/FULLPUB.pdf. The list offers a picture of sources and influences for his work.

scenes that dramatically retell the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). The original edition was published in 1973 and the second edition in 2005. The written text serves as a companion piece to the film. Bailey indicates that he wrote the play to convey the emotional impact and the richness of the story of the prodigal son (2005:89). Because the film also is a dramatisation of the parable, I believe it reflects this same intention.

Bailey interprets Luke 15 in two of his other books, *Jacob and the Prodigal* (2003) and *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15* (1992).³ Bailey underscores the importance of researching source materials for interpreting the New Testament from a distinctly Middle Eastern perspective. These materials include eastern Christian commentaries on Luke featuring translations from Greek into Syriac and Coptic and then into Arabic plus the early literature of the Jewish community in the Mishnah, and the two Talmuds (Bailey 2005:16; 1992:34-41). Elsewhere, Bailey uses insights from Middle Eastern oral tradition and literary analysis to study Lucan parables from what he describes as a 'literary cultural approach'.⁴ Bailey also finds background material for understanding Luke 15 in the Hebrew Bible. He compares Psalm 23 with the parable of the lost sheep in Luke 15:3-7. He draws a parallel between the Jacob story in Genesis 27:1--36:8 and the Lucan prodigal son story.

Using my construct of mission as translation with reliance upon Polanyian epistemology, I analyse Bailey's missional interpretation of Luke 15. I posit Arabic speakers and Muslim believers to be 'primary' potential receptor audiences for the film version of this gospel presentation. I offer an evaluation of Bailey's efforts, attempting to determine if he gives sufficient and balanced attention to source, witness, and

³ I consider all of Bailey's works on Luke 15 in order to probe his interpretation of the parables. I regard the 2005 volume (*The Cross and the Prodigal*), however, to be the key written work that helps to interpret the film. The film was produced in 2007 so it belongs to the same time frame as the second edition of the book (2005).

⁴ See Bailey's *Poet and Peasant: A Literary Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (1976) and *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables, Their Culture and Style* (1980).

receptor in his interpretation efforts. I evaluate how these dramatised gospel presentations succeed as fruitful missional efforts to promote dialogue and witness among Muslim viewers and hearers. I probe Bailey's presentations to determine how they reflect Christological and canonical sources, and how they connect 'witness' with 'dialogue' in mission efforts among peoples of other living faiths.⁵

Nowhere in his published writings does Bailey say explicitly that his retellings of the prodigal story are intended as missional presentations for a Muslim audience. He does hint at this intention, however, in several places. First, in his preface to his 1992 book, *Finding the Lost: Cultural Keys to Luke 15*, he refers to hearing Bishop Kenneth Cragg speak in the late 1950s in Jerusalem. The bishop was giving a lecture on Arabic language debates that occurred in the Middle Ages between Christians and Muslims. Bailey indicates that Cragg noted how the parable of the prodigal son featured prominently in those debates. Furthermore, he heard Cragg describe a traditional Muslim understanding of the parable that detects no hints of the Christian themes of the cross, suffering, incarnation, and mediator. Bailey reports that Cragg went on to make his own observation that intimations of the cross are reflected in the pain of the father's heart (Bailey 1992:9).

Bailey also notes in the preface of his 2005 book, *The Cross and the Prodigal*, that his living in the west and in the Arab world has given him missional eyes.

The result has been a new way to talk about the heart of our faith that can speak to the Muslim mind of the East and hopefully to the secular mind-set of the west. It is my prayer that it may also be of use in explaining the Christian faith in the global South.⁶ (Bailey 2005:16)

⁵ See the treatment of 'dialogue and witness' in David Singh, *The Word Made Flesh': Community, Dialogue and Witness* (2011:15-17). See also David Bosch's discussion of 'dialogue' (1991:483-9) within the larger section 'Mission as Witness among People of Living Faiths' (474-89). See also Jack Lorimer's discussion of 'dialogue' as an effort of American Presbyterians in Egypt (1950-2007) in which he credits Kenneth Cragg as an inspiring pioneer in the search for common ground between Muslims and Christians (2007:109-113).

⁶ Bailey also comments, 'Islam claims that in this story the boy is saved without a saviour' (2005:69). Bailey gives no reference in Islamic literature for this claim.

8.2 The Luke 15 Parables Retold in Film and Narrative Drama

Bailey and other scholars see Luke 15 as part of a larger section in Luke's Gospel that begins with 9:51 and concludes at 19:48. The long section is called the 'travel document.'⁷ The parables ought to be seen in light of Jesus' decision to go to Jerusalem where he would confront the religious authorities. Luke introduces the three stories in Luke 15 by describing a setting in which Jesus associated with sinners and was criticised by Jewish religious leaders.⁸

Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. And the Pharisees and the scribes murmured, saying, 'This man receives sinners and eats with them.' So he told them this parable. (Luke 15:1-3)

Bailey comments:

The audience to whom Jesus spoke was composed of Pharisees and scribes, the righteous of the community. Their complaint was that 'this man receives sinners and eats with them.' Three parties were involved: the religious [Pharisees] the irreligious [sinners] and Jesus. All three of these parties [the found, the lost and Jesus] appear in each of the three parables. Yet there is a noticeable progression to the accounts. The first story deals with animals. The second story is about lifeless coins. But in the third story people walk on the stage and begin talking. (2005:27)

The Greek term *prosdechomai*, translated 'receives' or 'welcomes' in verse 2, is used rather than *dechomai*, another term for 'welcoming' a guest. *Prosdechomai* indicates a deeper welcome in which the guest is treated like a friend. Eating with sinners is another dimension of being accepted and welcomed; breaking bread with someone in the Middle East is, according to Bailey, 'a sacramental act signifying acceptance on a very deep level' (2005:29).

Luke tells the three parables in sequence immediately after introducing them. The film and stage versions follow this same sequence. In these two dramatised versions Bailey introduces additional characters to expand the narrative. These fictional characters add detail and dialogue to the overall story. The biblical account includes the

⁷ Luke 9:51 reads: 'When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.'

⁸ See other table scenes with grumbling Pharisees in Luke's Gospel: 5:29-32, 7:36-50, and 19:1-10.

following characters: a shepherd who has lost a sheep, friends who rejoice when the sheep is found; a woman who loses and then finds a coin, friends and neighbours who rejoice when the coin is recovered; and a father and two sons, a citizen in the far country who has a herd of pigs, the father's slaves, and unnamed village folk who are part of the singing, dancing, and celebrating at the son's return.

In this movie, Dr. Kenneth E. Bailey weaves three of Jesus' parables together. The father owns 100 sheep. His shepherd loses one of them. The shepherd's wife loses a coin. Thus, all three parables of Luke 15 happen to people living on a single landed estate. These stories were set in the Middle East and that culture is taken seriously throughout the film. In order to express the inner tensions of the film Bailey found it necessary to create additional characters. The two brothers have a sister Salma. The prodigal in the far country joins a Greek pig herder and his daughter. In the film the interaction between characters provides opportunity to make explicit the theological content of the parables.⁹

The following outline of Luke 15 follows Bailey's interpretation scheme in the revised and expanded edition of *The Cross and the Prodigal* (2005).

8.2.1 Luke 15:1-10: Rejoice with Me (Parables of Lost Sheep and Lost Coin)

Luke 15:3-10 presents Jesus' twin parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin. A shepherd suffers the loss of one sheep from a flock of one hundred. A woman loses one coin out of her ten. Luke's repeating of key terms links these two stories together. The key terms are: lose/lost/sinner, recovery/*metanoia*, rejoice/joy, and to call together/to invite. The lost items are identified with sinners and the recovery of what was lost is linked with the repentance of a sinner. The references to heaven and angels of God associate the divine response to the finding of the lost. Jesus invites his listeners to see God represented in the figures of the prosperous shepherd and the poor woman. The denouement of celebration contrasts with the murmuring of the Pharisees described in the setting.

⁹ This description of the film version of the parables appears on Bailey's website at <http://www.shenango.org/Bailey/luke15.htm>.

Bailey identifies a number of cultural keys or background insights to help the reader understand these parables (1992:54-192).¹⁰ Using my understanding of Polanyi's tacit dimension, I view these keys as tacit particulars that, when integrated into a focal pattern, contribute to the gospel as it is uniquely depicted in Luke 15. Cultural keys in Luke 15:1-10 include:

1. Arabic translations of this text traditionally turn the notion of the lost sheep into a passive reading, 'if one of them is lost'. Thus, the responsibility of the shepherd is minimised in such a reading. Luke's Greek text clearly means, 'If he has lost one of them', thus placing responsibility upon the shepherd. Jesus is suggesting strongly that the Jewish authorities have lost the sheep of Israel. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, has come to seek and save the lost. Bailey sees Psalm 23, Jeremiah 23:1-8, and Ezekiel 34:1-31 expressing divine promises fulfilled in Jesus' shepherd ministry. The parable of the lost coin also vests responsibility with the one who lost the coin and seeks to recover it.

2. The work of carrying a sheep in order to restore it to the safe place among the other sheep is the onerous work of rescue. As the text says in verse 5, the shepherd 'lays it [sheep] on his shoulders.' The film version depicts this carrying of the burden in a way that emphasises the shepherd's labourious effort.

3. Bailey asks about the motive of the shepherd in seeking the lost sheep. Is it a matter of responsibility or pride not to lose one of the sheep entrusted to you? Bailey posits that additional motives 'spill into the parable' from the shepherd songs in John 10:1-18 and Psalm 23. In these examples the good shepherd cares for the sheep to the point of sacrifice, he saves sheep because of his love for them, and he seeks to reveal God as shepherd with power to save and to restore (Bailey 1992:75-8).

4. The coin is lost in a windowless house so a light is required in order to find it. The woman sweeps and searches with a lamp. Bailey believes the use of a woman in an

¹⁰ Bailey's insights about Middle Eastern culture reflected in his analysis of the Luke 15 parables agree at numerous points with observations advanced by Malina and Rohrbaugh (1992:369-73).

illustration represents a bold move to reject Pharisaic attitudes toward certain groups like unclean shepherds and careless women (Bailey 1976:158; 1992:94). When the shepherd searches and finds the sheep he becomes a good shepherd. Likewise the diligent woman finds her lost coin and becomes another exemplar of one who searches for and recovers the lost. Jesus identifies with both the good shepherd and the diligent woman (Bailey 1992:94-6).¹¹

5. Rejoicing with the community is the happy conclusion in both the lost sheep and lost coin parables¹². The terms used for ‘friends’ and ‘neighbours’ in the lost sheep parable (15:6) are masculine suggesting that men celebrated with men. In contrast the ‘friends’ and ‘neighbours’ with whom the woman celebrates in the lost coin parable (15:9) are female, again suggesting a separation of genders on certain occasions (Malina and Rohrbaugh 1992:370).

6. Bailey defines repentance in these stories as synonymous with being found.¹³ The shepherd’s searching effort pays the price to restore the sheep and the woman’s effort likewise denotes the price to recover the lost coin.

8.2.2 *Luke 15:11-12: The Death Wish (Younger Son Asks for Inheritance)*

The third parable in Luke 15 is introduced simply: ‘There was a man who had two sons’ (Luke 15:11). Three primary characters are introduced: a father, an older son, and a younger son. An unnamed citizen landowner in the far country hires the younger brother (15:15). An unnamed slave or servant is included in a scene with the older brother (15:26-7). The older son moves out of the story’s action until reappearing in verse 25. The plot begins with a transaction between the father and the younger son. The younger son entreats the father for his share of the estate and the father agrees: ‘he divided his

¹¹ Psalm 23:5 depicts God as a shepherd preparing a meal. Bailey sees this as a feminine metaphor for God that mirrors Luke 15:8-10 (Bailey 1992:96).

¹² See Bailey’s chiasmic reading of Luke 15:4-7 and 15:8-10. The A-B-A pattern in each pericope locates the theme of rejoicing in the central place of emphasis.

¹³ I critique this understanding of repentance in section 8.3.

property between them' (15:12). The division includes the disposition of the younger son's one-third share into cash. Perhaps the land or the rights to the land were sold for the capital.

Cultural keys in Luke 15:11-12 include:

1. The Jewish customs regarding inheritance law distinguish between division of the property and disposition of it. The latter ordinarily did not happen before the father's death. The decision to seek a division of the inheritance was initiated not by the father but by the son. This initiation and sequence are irregular and presumptuous.¹⁴ Bailey concludes that the request signifies the son's rejection of his family and is tantamount to a death wish for his father (2005:40-43).¹⁵

2. In the parable the son 'gathered all he had' and Bailey concludes that the New English Bible rightly translated this more conclusively as 'turned the whole of his share into cash' (Marshall 1978:607-608). Luke uses the rare word *ousia* in verses 12 and 13, meaning wealth or property or substance. Luke chooses not to use the usual word for inheritance, *kleronomia*, which he uses four times elsewhere. The prodigal has sold his share of the property for ready cash.

3. Bailey concludes that the son has broken his relationship with his father and family (2005:42-4). Wishing that his father was 'as good as dead' he received his share of the inheritance. But in forsaking the father, family, and village, the younger son became 'as good as dead' to those he left behind.

8.2.3 Luke 15: 13-19: *The Face Saving Plan (The Son Squanders and Seeks to Return)*

Luke tells the reader that the son departed to a far country and squandered his property in careless living. A distant country suggests a Gentile place and the mention of pigs

¹⁴ See Tobit 8:21, Sirach 33:20-24, and Deuteronomy 21:17.

¹⁵ Bailey makes his case appealing to eastern Christian commentators like Ibn al-Tayyib, Ibn al-Salibi, and Ibrahim Sa'id (1992:112-14). He notes a clear divide between western and eastern interpreters on the meaning of the younger son's request.

signals a setting abhorrent to Jewish practices. The onset of famine coupled with profligate spending leave the son hungry and needy. He hires himself out to a pig farmer, but no one gives him any food he can eat and digest. The story indicates that the young man came to his senses and sought to return to his home not with his former son's status but as a day labourer. The word 'father' is repeated three times in this section as the son decides to return.

Cultural keys in Luke 15:13-19 include:

1. Bailey refers to a first-century Jewish custom that literally cut off a Jewish boy if he lost his inheritance among Gentiles. If he dared to return home the community would break a large pot in front of him and cry out 'so-and-so is cut off from his people.' Bailey shows and tells the viewers and the readers that this ritual was called the *Kezazah* (cutting off) ceremony. This scene is dramatically rendered in the film. This tradition is not mentioned in the biblical text. The younger son had taken a huge risk by taking his money and going to the far country. Losing his resources among Gentiles would leave him homeless without rights.

2. Luke says the son 'squandered' his property; the word *dieskorpisen* literally means 'scattered.' There is no mention of how he scattered or squandered his substance. The implication that his lifestyle was immoral comes from the older brother's angry remarks. The phrase *zon asotos* means spendthrift living. The words occur only one time in the New Testament and are sometimes translated into English as dissolute or extravagant living. Arabic translations prefer a translation meaning 'extravagant living'.

Bailey's contextual knowledge of Middle Eastern villages leads him to reconstruct a dramatised picture of the younger brother using his money to establish himself as a generous host. 'He holds large banquets and gives out expensive gifts. Generosity is a supreme virtue, coveted by all.' The opportunity to gain status as a stranger in a foreign place moves him to spend everything (Bailey 2005:53-4). In the film version, Bailey

adds a scene where several unsavoury men entice the prodigal to invest in a questionable business deal effectively swindling him out of his remaining money.

3. A famine comes and the son finds a menial job feeding pigs. The irony of a Jew resorting to such labour among animals deemed unclean, indicates that he has come to a place of desperation. His plight includes his own acute hunger. He cannot digest the pods given to the pigs and begging among strangers proves unsuccessful.

4. At the end of his resources and with no means of support, the young son finally contemplates a return to his home. The film version adds the daughter of the pig farmer as a character, and she advises the son to return to his family. The phrase ‘but when he came to himself’ may indicate that he came to his senses strategically or it may signal a coming to a place of remorse and repentance. Bailey sees no true sign of repentance in the son’s desperation and resultant strategising at this point in the story.

5. Bailey points out that the son wanted to present himself to his father and village as a *misthios* rather than as a *doulos*. Is he hoping to be received as a craftsman or as merely a day labourer?¹⁶ Bailey opts for the former and reads this as an enterprising choice rather than an expression of humility and repentance (2005:59-61).

8.2.4 Luke 15:20-24: *The Shattering Confrontation (Father Welcomes Son Home)*

The younger son returns and his physical return, as opposed to his confession, is the reason reconciliation is possible. In Bailey’s reading of the parable, the son apparently did not need to do or say anything to persuade his father to accept him. He did need to be present among the family once again for his father to act quickly to restore him.¹⁷

The father’s compassion is what triggers the acts of restoration. The film depicts the

¹⁶ Joel Green interprets *misthios* as a day labourer, ‘a hireling whose subsistence is vulnerable to the full range of natural forces, the seasonal needs of the production of crops, and the whims of the estate manager.’ (1997:581) Bailey prefers the reading, ‘Fashion out of me a workman’ (15:19b). On this reading the prodigal will entreat his father to find him useful as a hired servant and free man (Bailey 1976:177-9).

¹⁷ In a private conversation (29 August 2012) Bailey referred to his own Augustinian interpretation that highlights the father graciously taking initiative to welcome and restore his son.

embrace, the kiss, the robe, the signet ring, and the sandals as emblematic of the son's honourable restoration. An extravagant banquet is held to celebrate the finding of the lost son.

Cultural keys in Luke 15:20-24 include:

1. The father runs toward his son—the word for 'run' that Luke uses is *dramon*, which is a technical term used of the footraces in the stadium. The film version indicates that the father, intercepting his son before the villagers find him, prevents others from treating the boy derisively. The father's compassion moves him to ignore the shame of running in robes and showing bare legs;¹⁸ Bailey sees themes of incarnation and humility in the father's actions.

2. The son's speech is shorter than the one rehearsed in verse 18. The son has either changed his mind about offering to become a hired hand as he had indicated, or the father interrupts the son before the son is able to say those words. Bailey prefers the former view and sees this as a deliberate decision by the son to surrender to his father. He makes this interpretation explicit in the film through a conversation between the younger son and his sister.¹⁹

3. The gifts represent restoration in the fullest sense. This lavish display tells the elders and other members of the village to accept the son because the father has done so.

4. The father is described as full of compassion and embraces his son and kisses him. He not only welcomes him but his emotional reception indicates that he wants reconciliation with the wayward son. He declares the boy was dead and now is alive; he was lost and now is found. Thus, the celebration begins and includes a banquet with the fatted calf. According to Bailey it would take 200 people to consume a fatted calf, indicating that the entire village is invited to the banquet (1992:155).

¹⁸ See Isaiah 47:1-3; Bailey observes that in Arabic translations of Luke 15 prior to 1860 there is no mention of the father running. He theorises that the father in the story is understood as a figure for God and running is too humiliating to be associated with the divine. (Bailey 1992:143-6)

¹⁹ The sister of the two brothers is one of several characters in the film version that add dramatic details; these invented characters are not in the biblical account.

8.2.5 Luke 15:25-32: *The Missing Climax (Older Son Refuses)*

The older son hears the commotion of the banquet and asks a young village boy for an explanation. Hearing what has transpired, the older brother is indignant. Perhaps this older son too is 'lost and dead' and is angry at his father's act of compassion and at the spending of the family wealth. He will not enter the house and the father must go out to him. The older son complains and expresses envy over the celebration. He calls the brother 'this son of yours' and the father in return refers to 'this brother of yours.' The father explains the reason for celebrating—the lost has been found. The story ends with the father's rejoinder and without further development. The story does not indicate whether the older son eventually changes his mind and attends the banquet. Likewise no reconciliation between the two brothers occurs. The parable simply ends with the father's speech to the older brother.

Cultural keys in Luke 15:25-32 include:

1. The messenger boy tells the older brother that 'your father has killed the fatted calf because he has gotten him back safe and sound' (Luke 15:27). The Greek word for 'has gotten him back' is *apolambano*. Bailey understands this word indicating that the father has actively worked to restore the son. The word *hygiano* is a Greek word referring to health and often is translated 'safe and sound'. Because Jesus spoke Aramaic Bailey finds a key to understanding this term in the *Septuagint*. There the word *hygiano* almost always translates from the Hebrew, the word *shalom* (peace). Thus the meaning can be that the boy was received in good health or he was welcomed in peace. Bailey believes the weighty word *shalom* lies behind *hygiano* and that it tells the reader that the celebration means the father has received his son with peace.

2. The elder son becomes angry at the news and refuses to come in and join the celebration, and thus he dishonours the father. If the message of the banquet is the

restoration of the younger son with *shalom*, it may be that the reconciliation is what upsets the older brother. In the first half of the parable the younger son always addresses his father as ‘father’. In the final conversation between the father and the older brother, the elder brother does not use the polite address, ‘father’. Similarly, he does not refer to his brother as ‘brother’ but as ‘this son of yours’.

3. Since the older brother stays outside, he remains estranged from his father and brother.

4. There is no final resolution to the story. The story ends with the father’s defence of his joy at the return of the son. The reader or listener is left wondering what the elder brother will do.

8.3 Bailey’s Presuppositions and Conclusions

Bailey’s film, *Finding the Lost*, displays a host of editorial decisions by the film’s decision-makers. Bailey himself was the screenwriter, and a veteran Egyptian cinema professional served as the director.²⁰ A noticeable cinematic decision was the introduction of invented characters not a part of the biblical stories. In *Finding the Lost* we meet a woman, Salma, who is the sister of the younger and older brothers. Another additional character is a woman who is the daughter of the Greek pig farmer who hires the younger brother to feed the pigs. The film pictures a friendship bordering on romance between the daughter and the prodigal. Dialogue between these two characters is used to show the prodigal wrestling with a decision to return to his father’s house. Other minor characters appear as well: a village mayor, village elders, local citizens, and the young men who persuade the prodigal to invest in their bogus moneymaking scheme.

²⁰ Bailey indicated in a private conversation (29 August 2012) that the English language conclusion that appears as text on the screen and that invites viewers to make discipleship decisions was added by the production company and does not reflect his will as the screenwriter.

The movie begins with a prelude or introductory scene that rehearses a *Kezazah* ceremony and shows the father placing a loaf of bread on a table each day as a kind of waiting gesture that indicates the father is keeping vigil for his son to return from the far country. To Christian viewers the bread may suggest the Eucharist. When the son returns and is reconciled, the bread of the Lord's Supper can be broken and shared.

A film tells a story in ways that differ from narrative text and require additional details. Certain editorial decisions, however, suggest to me that Bailey and his team are not content to let the biblical story unfold on its own terms. The extra characters, the symbolic bread, the *Kezazah* ceremony, and the father's running and intercepting the son before angry villagers can find him and beat him, combine to emphasise the father's love as sacrificial, humbling, and zealous. Combining the shorter two parables, lost sheep and lost coin, with the parable about the two sons into one larger narrative is creative and intriguing. On the other hand, Bailey's exegesis of Luke 15 sometimes forces the interpretation of the third parable to comport with the two shorter parables. Bailey defines repentance in these parables as being found. The lost coin and lost sheep are inanimate objects with no volitional ability. They cannot find their way back and must be recovered by a human agent. But does this mean that the two sons are not culpable for recognising their errors and for turning back to receive the father's love? Is repentance for them also simply a matter of being found? This parallel yields a conclusion that seems atypical in light of the larger biblical witness.

Bailey brings to his study three broad presuppositional categories. These are, first, an awareness of the need to address and solve what Bailey terms the 'translation' problem of cultural foreignness. The stories of the synoptic Gospels occurred in first century Palestine and that represents a great cultural distance to most places and peoples today. Bailey's detailed familiarity with Middle Eastern village life helps him in his efforts to bridge this gap. The enterprise of recovering the cultural setting of Jesus' parables is

what Bailey has called Oriental exegesis (1976:28-9). Bailey translates not only words but also settings and customs in capturing the text's meaning and in communicating this meaning cross-culturally.

Bailey finds in Luke 15 what he calls two double parables. Luke 15:4-11 presents the lost sheep and lost coin parables in tandem. The larger story is comprised of two parables that speak of the two sons. Both the younger son parable (15:11-32) and the second parable of the older son (15:24-32), according to Bailey, follow a parabolic ballad structure that uses inverted parallelism Bailey (1976:159-61).²¹

Bailey contends that paying attention to Luke's use of the 'parabolic ballad' structure helps the reader identify 'the climactic centre' or discern 'how the author relates the centre to the outside' or 'makes clear the turning point of the passage' (Bailey 1976:72-4). In one of his early studies Bailey argues that a parable has three elements.²² Based on the details of his literary cultural approach, Bailey's conclusions about the meaning of parables are expressed in terms of these theological clusters. He articulates the phrase 'theological clusters' in his earliest publication (Bailey 1976:37-83; 2005:87-9).

In his revised version of *The Cross and the Prodigal* (2005) Bailey identifies 12 motifs he sees as comprising the theological cluster in the 'Parable of the Two Lost Sons'. The list of 12 theological subjects includes: sin, freedom, repentance, grace, joy, fatherhood, sonship, Christology, family/community, incarnation and atonement, Eucharist, and eschatology. I will comment on those motifs that are particularly prominent in Bailey's several exegetical treatments of Luke 15.

²¹ For example, in the younger son parable, there are two stanzas of six lines each. These stanzas are thematically parallel in an inverted schema.

²² First, a parable has one or more points of contact (referents) within the real world of the listener, which can be called 'symbols.' The second element in a parable is the 'response' that the original listener is pressed to make to the original telling of the story. The third element is a combination of theological motifs in the parable that together pressed the original listener to make that response. This combination we choose to call the 'theological cluster.' Thus, one or more symbols with corresponding referents in the life of the listener impel him to make a single response that has in view a cluster of theological motifs (1976:38).

8.3.1 Fatherhood: The Father's Enduring Love

Bailey clearly sees in the father figure of the prodigal story an atypical Middle Eastern father whose grace and compassion point to the God of the Christian scriptures. Jesus' many references in his teaching to his heavenly father echo this father figure in Luke 15 (Bailey 1992:113-19).²³

Joel Green comments:

It is worth recalling that a primary image of God in Luke's travel narrative has been God as Father (e.g. Luke 11:1-13; 12:22-34), a portrait continued in this parable. Against the interpretive horizons of the Roman world, wherein the characteristic attributes of the father as the *paterfamilias* are remembered especially in terms of authoritarianism and legal control, the picture Luke paints is remarkable for its counter-emphasis on care and compassion. (1997:579)

Bailey cites Ibrahim Said, an Egyptian Protestant scholar, who points out that the portrayal of the father in the parable clearly does not fit a traditional understanding of a Middle Eastern father.

The shepherd in his search for the sheep, and the woman in her search for the coin, do not do anything out of the ordinary beyond what anyone in their place would do. But the actions of the father in the third story are unique, marvellous; divine actions which have not been done by any earthly father in the past. (Bailey 1992:114)

8.3.2 Sin: Two Sons Both Fail to Love the Father

Bailey articulates in his film, play, and commentaries that both sons fail to relate to the father as loving sons. He sees the two sons as embodying two contrasting kinds of sin: the younger sins as a lawbreaker and the older sins as a law keeper. How can the apparently obedient elder son be identified as a sinner since he obeys his father? In the final scene the older son refuses his father's entreaty to come into the house; he refuses to accept the return of his brother and to honour the father's decision to welcome the younger son back into the family and community. Bailey sees both kinds of sins as sin against love. The rabbinic admonition not to shame another in public takes on more

²³ The use of the word father in reference to God appears in Deuteronomy 32:6; Psalm 2:7, 89:26; Isaiah 63:16, 64:8; Jeremiah 3:4, 19, 31:9; and Malachi 1:6, 2:10.

intensity when it is a father shamed by his son. The older son realises that this banquet celebrates not only his brother's return but also the prodigal's reconciliation with the father. Bailey expresses the seriousness of this shame by citing Ibn al-Tayyib's comment.²⁴

[In his refusal to enter] the older son demonstrated maliciousness of character and meanness. He has no love for his brother and no appropriate respect for his father. His position in this regard is equivalent to the grumbling of the scribes and Pharisees against the Christ for his acceptance of sinner. (1992:171)

8.3.3. Incarnation and Atonement: The Father Suffers to Forgive and Pays a Price to Love His Sons

The father rejects both meting out punishment for the offending actions of his older son and any act of vengeance when the younger son returns empty handed. Bailey interprets the father granting the 'share of the inheritance' as a costly suffering of his son's rejecting of his love. The father gives the son the freedom to reject the offered relationship of being a son. The father also suffers humiliation when he gathers his robes and runs in an unseemly fashion to receive his returning prodigal.²⁵ Bailey concludes that the suffering and humiliation represent costly love and reflect images of Jesus' own incarnation and atonement (1992:116; 2005:67).

Bailey sees the father acting in a scene of 'very painful self-emptying love' when he comes out to entreat the elder son to come inside (Luke 15:28b). The scene is a public one, according to Bailey, with many guests and servants in a position to overhear the conversation. The Greek word that is translated 'entreat' or 'plead' is *parakaleo*. The Fourth Gospel uses a noun form of this term to describe the Holy Spirit as the *Paraclete*

²⁴ The younger son's actions provide a window for seeing the father's covenant mercy as a reflection of God the Father's compassion. It is likely that the angry older brother suggests a parallel with the Pharisees and scribes who heard Jesus tell the parable but could not rejoice with sinners restored.

²⁵ Bailey places great emphasis on the embarrassment or humiliation of the father as an older man running in undignified fashion. Malina and Rohrbaugh agree with Bailey about the embarrassment of an older man running in unseemly fashion. They assert that his running is less about welcoming the prodigal and more about protecting the returning son from the villagers' hostility (1992:372).

(comforter, advocate, counsellor, friend). In this setting it connotes tenderness rather than confrontation. Bailey believes the father's agony of rejected love may be more painful in the encounter with the older son because of the public nature of the insult (2005:83-85; 1992:173).²⁶

Here it is instructive to recall the other two parables in Luke 15 that precede the story of the two sons. In each scenario something was lost and someone exerted effort and thus paid a price to retrieve the lost item. In the final parable the father pays a price to retrieve or reclaim his lost sons.

8.3.4 Sonship: Sons or Servants

By his actions each son defines his relationship to the father as a servant. The father claims each as a son, and the father is determined to love and to be loved. He is not content merely to be served by servants but wants to enjoy a loving relationship with his sons. This is a conclusion drawn by Bailey in his summary description of the theological cluster he finds in the parable (2005:88; 1992:191).

In verse 29 the elder brother says in his speech that he worked as a slave for the father and never disobeyed him. Referring to himself as an obedient slave ignores the fact that the elder brother is essentially a co-owner of the estate and stands to inherit what his father owns. Using the word 'slave' does indicate a kind of relational attitude toward the father. The story by Luke uses the word *huios* (son) eight times. The father's speech to his older son makes use of the word *teknon* (my beloved boy). The Greek-to-Arabic version of Luke uses the term *ya waladi*; Bailey explains that this is a tender

²⁶ Bailey quotes the Arabic commentator, Ibn al-Tayyib, translating his description of the final scene into English. 'Look at the heart of this father! It is full of tenderness and love in that he left the banquet, the guests, and his younger son to plead with his older son to come in. It is as if his own joy is incomplete as long as one of his children is grieving. He does not rebuke the older son on his hardness of heart or his inappropriate sensitivities. In like manner the heavenly Father desires the entrance of the scribes and the Pharisees into the kingdom of heaven as much as the tax collectors and sinners. Thus he demonstrated longsuffering and intense desire for them to come to him even as did this earthly father' (1992:173).

term similar to the Aramaic *abba* and is used by a loving father addressing a beloved son (2005:86; 1992:183-4).

In Section 8.6 I examine evidence that Muslims see themselves as Allah's servants but never as Allah's sons or daughters. Bailey highlights this distinction between one's religious identity as a servant or as a son (1992:140-142). I was intrigued to hear this distinction affirmed by Muslim students during an informal discussion of Bailey's film.²⁷

8.4 Evaluating Bailey's Scholarship

Bailey's work in the field of 'Middle Eastern New Testament studies' reflects two categories of academic endeavor. One is his sensitivity to the Middle Eastern world in uncovering cultural clues to understanding the synoptic Gospels. The other is his regard for literary structures and rhetorical style. For this study it is his scholarship regarding first-century Palestinian culture that I find particularly relevant.

New Testament scholar, Richard Bauckham, asserts that there are three main models of oral tradition used by scholars to understand the process of gospel transmission in the early church. He associates one of those models with Bailey and gives the model approbation by indicating that fellow scholars N.T Wright and James Dunn have adopted it as well.²⁸ He believes Bailey's scholarship has not received the attention it deserved because Bailey published his signal article in an obscure journal (Bauckham 2006:252).²⁹

²⁷ I hosted a dinner, film viewing, and film discussion of Bailey's Arabic language film dramatization of the Luke 15 parables, *Finding the Lost*, on 6 July 2012. Four male Muslim graduate students attending Virginia Commonwealth University from Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq participated and one commented, 'Muslims see themselves as servants of Allah whereas Christians see themselves as children of God.' I was startled to see Bailey's distinction affirmed by a spontaneous comment.

²⁸ The other two models are associated with R. Bultmann (informal, uncontrolled tradition) and B. Gerhardsson (formal controlled tradition).

²⁹ See Bailey 'Informal Controlled Oral Tradition and the Synoptic Gospels', *Asia Journal of Theology* 5 (1991) 34-51.

Wright notes that Bailey's model of an 'informal controlled tradition' occupies a position between the two extreme models represented by other scholars. In a setting manifesting an informal controlled tradition, a story can be retold in the setting of a village by any member of the gathering. But because it is the elders who usually speak, the community thus exercises a measure of control in determining what particular speakers are allowed to speak publicly. Yet the tradition is not formal with fixed forms of teaching passed down from teacher to disciples. The control over the transmission of these oral traditions varies. Poems and proverbs allow no flexibility. Some flexibility in retelling is allowed with parables and accounts of important persons. Bailey indicates that more flexibility is allowed when 'the material is irrelevant to the identity of the community, and is not judged wise or valuable' (Bailey 1991:45).

Wright appreciates Bailey's notion of oral tradition and what transpires in a peasant village's transmitting of tradition. He notes that it allows for various kinds of storytellers shaping material within a framework. He calls Bailey's proposal one that has the 'smell of serious social history about it' (Wright 1996:135). Dunn also appreciates Bailey's work and believes that his findings accord with other investigations of oral tradition. He concludes that the previous paradigms offered by Bultmann and Gerhardsson are inadequate (Dunn 2003:209-10).

More sceptical in their appraisals are New Testament scholars Richard Bauckham and Ben Witherington. Witherington points out that Bailey's informally controlled tradition model is based on an assumed analogy between first-century Palestine and what Bailey observed in Middle Eastern villages in the twentieth century. Witherington believes it takes too much of a leap of faith to accept this analogy.³⁰ He questions

³⁰ Witherington makes his comments in assessing James Dunn's reliance upon Bailey's observations. He notes that Dunn is positive about Bailey's work yet admits that Bailey's findings are anecdotal and that 'we certainly do not know enough about oral traditioning in the ancient world to draw from that knowledge clear guidelines for our understanding of how the Jesus tradition was passed down in its oral stage' (Dunn 2003:210). Witherington concludes that drawing a parallel between twentieth century

whether Jesus and his disciples bear that much resemblance to modern Palestinian nomads and villagers. He questions further if sacred traditions might have been passed on in ways different from other stories, parables, proverbs, and accounts (Witherington 2009b:127-8).

Bauckham raises similar concerns in his study of the role of eyewitnesses and the Jesus tradition. He asks of Bailey's model what persons would have handled the controlling process and how were the controls exercised? Bauckham concludes that the three models of oral tradition are not sufficiently nuanced to account for how the transmission of the Jesus tradition in the early church operated.³¹ He does appreciate Bailey's observations about the importance of oral communication in both teaching and learning in early Christianity (Bauckham 2006:252-63).

My reading of Bailey and his interpreters leads me to be cautiously optimistic about his reading and understanding of the New Testament synoptic Gospels. I believe his understanding of modern peasant culture in the Middle East does inform his reading of the gospel in ways that contribute insights. In places he develops key findings but at times he applies contemporary observations to ancient settings too heavily.³² I shall provide specific examples of my agreement and disagreement in the conclusion to this case study.

8.5 Translation Motifs And Polanyian Insights Applied

Bailey's life experience and scholarship equip him to serve as both an insider and outsider in the work of being an interpreter of the Luke 15 parables for Arabic speaking

village life in the Middle East and the first-century Jewish culture of Jesus and his disciples, is 'an enormous assumption that needs substantiation' (Witherington 2009b:127-8).

³¹ Bauckham wonders in particular how the canonical Gospels related to the oral tradition and what was the role of eyewitnesses. Nonetheless, Bauckham finds helpful the work of Bailey and Dunn in fleshing out a clearer understanding of the oral tradition vis-a-vis the Christian gospels (Bauckham 2006:252-63).

³² Luke Timothy Johnson both praises and critiques Bailey's attention to cultural details as an 'obsessive reading' of the Lucan texts (1983:102).

Muslims. As an insider he has observed customs and practices in the Middle East that shed light on the biblical text. He reads and writes Arabic and has gleaned insights from Arabic and Syriac versions of the Bible. He also has lived and studied in the West and has a western family lineage. As an outsider of sorts, he can function as a tacit observer in observing customs in either the West or the Middle East. Like other double culture persons he may not be completely at home in either world, so he can claim and utilise an outsider's perspective when he observes and draws conclusions in either cultural setting. The work of translation requires knowledge of both the source and receptor cultures. Bailey's education and life experiences of 'indwelling' settings in the Middle East, likewise helps him to see into Arabic cultures.

8.5.1 Indigenous Elements

In reading Kwame Bediako I note his emphasis on primal elements in a culture as cultural particulars contributing to larger cultural patterns. Such particulars may be elucidated categorically as tacit clues that the translator integrates into coherent patterns. In his work on Luke 15, 'Cultural Keys to Luke 15,' Bailey discusses a long list of indigenous particulars seen in the Middle Eastern culture of first-century Palestine that are features of the three parables. He examines words in Greek and Arabic; he explores customs and geography; and he notes aspects of Hebrew parallelism by means of rhetorical analysis. Bailey claims that the story-telling Jesus of the gospels was a metaphorical theologian unlike the apostle Paul, whom Bailey sees as a conceptual theologian under the influence of Greek Platonism.

In Polanyian terms, a parable or a metaphor presents both focal knowledge and tacit knowledge (a comprehensive focal pattern that integrates tacit clues or particulars). The observer or translator can shift focus from observing the larger pattern to paying attention to one or many particulars. Shifting attention changes what appears to the

observer as focal and what appears as tacit in any given instance of paying attention. In isolating these indigenous particulars, Bailey helps the reader or viewer to see what composes the picture or pattern that emerges from the Luke 15 parables. In Chapter Five I explained a process of analysis using Polanyi's 'from-to' oscillating pattern of paying attention to both the focal image and the particulars that form the image. This method is useful here in assigning weight to Bailey's various cultural keys. One puts such analysis to good use in going on to intergrate the keys/particulars in pursuit of evaluating how the Luke 15 characters interact and fit into an overall way of articulating the Christian gospel.

8.5.2 Identity and Conversion: Repentance, Response to the Father's Love

In Chapter Four I studied Bediako's quest to explain identity as both Christian and African. Likewise I noted Walls definition of 'conversion' as a turning of a person or a community toward Christ. These missional motifs help us articulate Bailey's contrast between sonship and servanthood as a key identity question in the parable of the two sons. Both sons see themselves beholden to their father as servants or slaves. Though they stand to inherit portions of the family wealth, they see their lives in the present light of their relative subservience. The younger son yearns for freedom to go and pursue his own way. The older son is content to stay and serve obediently until his father's welcome of his prodigal brother triggers anger and resentment.

Bailey concludes that both sons see themselves as servants because they view themselves functionally rather than relationally. In essence, both sons refuse their father's love and live as servants albeit at the top of the family's pecking order. They may be obedient but they are neither grateful nor loving toward their father. One son shows this by leaving and going far away. The other stays but cannot rejoice with his

father when his wayward brother's return becomes the occasion for the father's rejoicing. In the end one son turns toward the father and one son turns away.

Bailey's understanding of the Augustinian perspective on God's grace finding a lost person drives him to understand repentance as 'accepting of being found.' Bailey believes the same definition of repentance must be operational in all three stories. He highlights this idea of repentance in the parable of the two sons because the sons are agents, unlike the sheep and coin. I have indicated I think this interpretation of repentance is flawed. This is an example where I see a tacit particular wrongly interpreted and leading to an improper emphasis. Bailey overemphasises both the parallelism between parables and his Augustinian presuppositions. He fails to regard the balancing perspective on 'repentance' offered in the larger testimony of the biblical witness by forcing a parallel among the three stories in Luke 15. True repentance or turning, however, does lead to the younger son's responding to the father's love with humility and gratitude. The Luke text indicates that the waiting father says, 'My son was dead and is alive.' The verb in verse 24 is *anazao* and can be rendered 'has come to life'. Bailey sees the younger son to be both 'found' and 'resurrected' (1992:161).

8.5.3 A Polanyian Lens

My effort to understand Bailey's treatment of Luke 15 as an example of missional translation draws upon Michael Polanyi's theory of tacit knowing. Descriptively, it has been useful to identify strands in Bailey's retellings as tacit particulars. Following where each tacit coefficient leads along the *from-to* trajectory has shown us that Bailey reasons:

1. From the human father to a sense of divine fatherhood;
2. From servanthood to sonship;
3. From the father's humility and sacrifice to an expanded notion of God's mercy;

4. From the suffering of the father to a picture of the suffering servant interpreted by the New Testament as Jesus with hints of incarnation, atonement, and crucifixion; and

5. From the surprising character of the love expressed by the father for his two sons to a view of divine love full of both *hesed* (lovingkindness) and *emet* (faithfulness).

I alluded earlier to Kenneth Cragg's influence upon Bailey, noting his emphasis upon the particulars of 'sentness' and 'mercy' in the Muslim understanding of Allah. These particulars offer Bailey some common ground in talking to Muslims about God's mercy on display in the Christ story. Bailey's presentation pays attention to the examples (particulars) of costly love shown by the father. He sees the father's efforts as reminiscent of the Son's costly love in the gospels' passion story. He sees that same love beckoning to his sons to enter a relationship of costly love. A Polanyian perspective on Bailey's efforts would pay attention to how these particulars inform a patterned understanding of God's nature and actions. Fatherhood and sonship and servanthood are linked to love that is costly and merciful. Bailey believes this portrait of God the Father and God the Son emerge in dramatic fashion in the story of the two sons in Luke 15.

Michael Polanyi refers to the act of 'indwelling a story' whereby the observer or outsider enters another person's life, culture, and circumstances. This notion of indwelling is an important dimension of his epistemology. A knowing subject is an embodied person. The person or knowing agent dwells in his or her own body and can dwell in the use of tools that become an extension of one's body. Indwelling also can refer to what Polanyi calls 'interiorization' in the sense of inhabiting a moral framework or a tradition (Polanyi 1966:17). Polanyi emphasises the connection between the tacit dimension and indwelling when he says, 'it is not by looking at things, but by dwelling in them, that we understand their joint meaning' (1966:18). Furthermore, indwelling can be extended to mean inhabiting and performing a story amid other stories in a given

cultural setting. One of Polanyi's interpreters, Lesslie Newbigin, points out the necessity of indwelling the biblical story by relating it imaginatively to other stories (Newbigin 1989:98).

In presenting the Luke 15 parables in the story versions of film and drama, Bailey recaptures the power of the story that endears the parables of Jesus to audiences ancient and modern. Bailey sees stories as vehicles of theological beliefs and argues the case for the importance of storytelling in Middle Eastern settings in a scholarly article on the transmission of oral tradition. Bailey describes his own experience of gathering with villagers for the evening ritual of the telling of stories and the recitation of poetry. He indicates that the name for this gathering is *haflat samar*. Bailey explains that *samar* in Arabic is a cognate of the Hebrew *shamar* and means to preserve. The community preserves its tradition by telling its stories, poems, proverbs, parables, and riddles. Generally, it is the older and more prominent men who do most of the reciting and storytelling (Bailey 1991:40-41). Bailey's emphasis on the storied form of the gospel dovetails with an insight that links the power of story with the human imagination.³³

John Renard argues that examples of narrative theology are an important expression of religious belief in both Islam and Christianity. In exploring the relationship between creed and story he avers that fundamental convictions about God usually take shape first in stories and later in summary formulations called creeds. Because the Qur'an is regarded as a literary unity and because the text is seen to be God's own speech, narrative functions in ways differently from the Bible's tradition of having many human authors. The Qur'an does include many brief narrative passages, but no narrative material about Muhammad the Prophet. It does include accounts of the pre-Islamic prophets. The longest such narrative is about Joseph (Surah 112) and the account relates

³³ Gavin Flood discusses narrative theory and cites Gerard Genette, who has developed a distinction between narrative as story (what happened) and narrative as discourse (about what happened). Bailey takes the stories of Jesus and presents discourses about them in texts and a retelling of them in film. The film then is on offer as a missional translation of 'the gospel within the gospel' (Flood 1999: 117-42).

his story as a single literary unit (Renard 2011:75-6). On the other hand, Muslims have a rich storehouse of biographical details about the Prophet known as the *hadith*. Lamin Sanneh, who has lived both in Muslim and Christian family settings, comments that westerners could benefit from the Muslim appreciation of narrative and tradition (1996a:48).

Christian theologians sometimes refer to the entirety of Christian revelation and experience as the Christian story. There is a narrative trajectory in the Christian scriptures beginning with creation in Genesis and concluding with an apocalyptic vision of a new heaven and a new earth in Revelation. The story of Israel in the Old Testament and the story of Jesus and the Christian church in the New Testament give covenantal shape to the story. This story to which the Christian church bears testimony features divine-human encounters at key points in history. The story then, according to theologian Paul Fiddes, is ‘the result of meeting this speaking God in many times and places. The story aspect of Christian faith emphasises that God meets with his people in space and time.’ Fiddes goes on to ask how Christians shall relate the story to the many stories that make up various cultures (2001:134).

8.6 Bailey’s Efforts in Light of Muslim Beliefs and Muslim-Christian Relations

The Trinitarian understanding of terms for Fatherhood and Sonship (and Spirit), plus the Christological themes of incarnation and atonement, present major theological obstacles for a Muslim who hears and sees the parables in Luke 15 according to Bailey’s retelling. Christian and Muslim teachings about Jesus diverge at many points. Therefore a Christian missionary who seeks to offer Christian interpretations of biblical themes to Muslim persons will need to face the challenge of finding language and religious categories that share common points of contact. Terry Muck and Frances Adeney

address the challenge for Christians communicating with persons of other religious traditions. Christians communicate in terms of a text (Bible), into various contexts (languages, cultures, traditions) and with a need for awareness of a communicator's conscious or unconsciously held pretexts. They describe pretexts as 'the values and thought forms one brings to the reading of religious texts' (Muck and Adeney 2009:13-14).³⁴

Muslims also have a sacred text, the Qur'an, which is 'the corpus of Arabic utterances sent down by God (Allah) to Muhammad conveyed in a way that categorically established its authenticity' (Winter 2008:19). Kenneth Cragg explains that for the Muslim, ultimate speech is prophecy 'sealed' or accomplished in Muhammad whereas the primary speech of God for the Christian is personality; Jesus is the incarnate word of God. Thus the Bible serves as a secondary word to the person of Jesus Christ come in the flesh. Muslims traditionally view the Qur'an as divine and infallible and object to calling it a text because that implies it has a human author (Bennett 2008:11). Muslims see the Torah and the Gospels as revealed by God yet corrupted since these books disagree in places with the surahs of the Qur'an.³⁵ Islam can posit that the original version of the Christian scriptures was not corrupt but is irrecoverable (Cragg 2000:254-6).

In the case studies presented in this dissertation, I am researching primarily the intention of the missional translator. Evidences of reception of the gospel in historical case studies may be inferred but cannot be measured adequately. Likewise, there is insufficient evidence to measure adequately a Muslim response to Bailey's missional

³⁴ This triad of 'text, pretexts and contexts' resembles the source, witness, and receptor trio articulated by Nida and Newbiggin. See Chapter Five.

³⁵ The Qur'an refers to the Torah and the Gospels as revelation in 3.3-3, 5.46, and 5.110. Other Qur'anic verses, however, question their integrity in the Christian scriptures; see 5.15, 2.75, and 5.13.

presentations and attempting to do so lies beyond the scope of this case study.³⁶ Instead I will identify points of continuity and discontinuity between several emphases in Bailey's presentations and Islamic understandings of similar themes as indicated in the Qur'an. I invoke the scholarship of Kenneth Cragg because Bailey's numerous citations of Cragg indicate a similarity of thought and a measure of dependence. Bailey also admits his familiarity with Cragg's published works.³⁷

8.6.1 God's Nature Revealed and Interpreted

Can God or Allah be described as the merciful one or as a loving God? Does the notion of a merciful God mean that God becomes involved in the concerns of humanity? What do Islam and Christianity say to this understanding of God? The message is proclaimed throughout the Qur'an that God has *Al-Asma al-Husna* (Beautiful Names) and that they number 99 in all. Cragg points out that the most important of the divine names in Islam, however, are the twin titles *Al-Rahman al-Rahim*, translated into English as 'the Compassionate' or 'the Merciful'. The first term is a noun and the second is an adjective; the two combine to mean the Merciful Mercier or the Compassionate Compassionator. The *Rahman* is the one who is merciful in character and the *Rahim* is that same one in merciful action (Cragg 2000:34).

Intimations of Allah as loving and compassionate register, however, under a larger heading that reads the Qur'an as divine speech revealing God's will rather than his nature. A Muslim learns to read the Qur'an in a way that affirms the attributes without undermining Allah's transcendence and unity; *El-Bizri*, 'God: essence and attributes' (Winter 2008:122). Muhammad's concern was with what God demanded. Islam emphasises enlightenment, law, obedience and submission rather than metaphysical

³⁶ I asked Bailey (29 August 2012) if he had evidence of responses to the film. He reported that the film has been shown on state television in a number of countries but he does not have empirical data about particular responses.

³⁷ I learned in a telephone conversation with Bailey (29 August 2012) that he studied with Cragg on several occasions, read many of his books, and corresponded regularly with him.

expression or theological reflection. Adherents of the Christian faith would locate God's mercy pre-eminently in the humility and suffering of the Messiah. If confronted by the question of where God demonstrates himself to be merciful, a Christian naturally invokes the work of Jesus Christ in his cross and resurrection.

The Christian scriptures present an understanding of God as involved in his created order and connected to his creatures in covenant relationship. The New Testament articulates a new covenant in the ministry of the Messiah who is confessed by the church as both fully human and fully divine. The doctrine of God's incarnation in Jesus Christ expresses divine sovereignty vis-a-vis humility in a way that appears inscrutable to Muslim sensibilities.

Colin Chapman, a British missionary who lived and worked in the Middle East, has written about ways that Muslims and Christians have talked to each other about their respective faiths. One of Chapman's representative figures engaged in Christian-Muslim dialogue is Kenneth Bailey.³⁸ Chapman sees Bailey's treatment of Jesus' parables as providing a helpful set of insights for Christians to use in relating to Muslims.

He summarises Bailey's sense that in the parables Jesus presented a major theme, namely, 'the costly demonstration of unexpected love.' Chapman argues that Bailey details this theme in the parable of the two lost sons in Luke 15 according to the following sequence:

1. God loves all people.
2. His love is unexpected, since we would not expect him to love rebellious creatures.
3. Not only does he proclaim his love, however, he actually demonstrates his love in action.
4. This demonstration of his unexpected love is costly for him, since in a sense he suffers in the process of forgiving sins. (Chapman 1998:107)

For Bailey the waiting father in the two lost sons parable represents a Christian understanding of God's mercy whose involvement with his covenant children reaches a climax in the incarnate ministry of Jesus Christ. The Luke 15 parables show God's

³⁸ All of Chapman's representative figures belong to the past except Bailey.

mercy, therefore, with hints of incarnation and its humility plus an example of suffering suggestive of the bigger picture of the atoning death of Christ on the cross.

Islamic teaching could affirm God's love but would balk at the proposal that God is directly involved in human affairs or that he suffers in offering forgiveness. The fundamental sin in Islam is the human act of associating Allah with other entities. Such association or *shirk* is viewed in the larger category of idolatry.³⁹ Cragg identifies a possible point of convergence between the two religions in the ideas of *rasuliyah* (sentness) and *Rasul* (the sent one). In Islam a prophet is a sent one, as a messenger, and in Christian thinking Jesus the Christ is God's primary sent one. Cragg was testing the waters in search of an 'association of the divine and the human' that need not be classified as *shirk* (idolatrous association). Revelation in Cragg's view has a divine source, which is God's will, but also has a human locus through the mouth of the prophet. On the face of the rival claims regarding prophethood in Islam or messiahship in Christianity, it seems to me that the person of Jesus the Christ cannot be described adequately by the category of *rasuliyah*.⁴⁰

Cragg argues that divine nearness and God's help imply a kind of divine vulnerability. He says further that Christians and Muslims need to be open to differing criteria. Cragg cites Gregory of Nyssa: 'That the omnipotence of God's nature should have had strength to descend to the lowliness of humanity furnishes a more manifest proof of power' (1985:207).⁴¹ These observations by Cragg undergird Bailey's emphasis on divine love manifested in humility and suffering in his treatments of the Luke 15 parables. A Polanyian perspective on Bailey's efforts utilising Cragg's

³⁹ Cragg sought to explore a connection between the Christian concept of incarnation and Islamic teaching in an essay, 'Islam and Incarnation,' presented to a 1970 symposium, 'Truth and Dialogue' (1974:126-39).

⁴⁰ See for example, Peter's confession in Matthew 16:13-20 and the other synoptic gospels, where he distinguishes Jesus from Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets. Furthermore, none of the Old Testament prophets are included in the Qur'an. Old Testament figures are cited but not the prophets per se.

⁴¹ Richard Jones's summary of Cragg's view of the cross applies also to Cragg's view of incarnation. 'In many prose works Cragg has argued that the Cross does not contradict God's sovereignty but rather demonstrates the mode of God's sovereignty over his creation. God's is an engaged sovereignty; a costly sovereignty, a sovereignty that will not let go' (2003:100).

understandings, would pay attention to these particulars of ‘sentness’ and ‘mercy’. These tacit clues inform a patterned understanding of God who may be seen to be reaching out to humankind with love, even costly love. The understanding of Allah in the Qur’an or of God in the Christian scriptures depends in each instance upon an adherent seeing the pattern of particulars: names, attributes, actions, associations, and implications combined as variously-hued strands in a woven rug. The two religions, however, contain differing tacit particulars. Islam’s understanding of Allah as all-powerful is balanced by the attributes of Allah as compassionate, merciful, and forgiving. But are these views equal in emphasis and thus complementary or does one attribute dominate the other? Without the Christian emphasis of God’s love as self-giving, suffering, and sacrificial, seen supremely in Jesus’ incarnation and crucifixion, the opportunity and transformative power for sinners to respond to God in repentance seems a remote possibility in Islam (Grams 2008:157-66).

8.6.2 Muslim and Christian Understandings of Jesus/Isa

The Qur’an speaks of Jesus by employing an array of honorific names and titles. Jesus is called by his given name Jesus, *Isa* in Arabic, by the titles Messiah and Son of Mary and by the names Messenger, Prophet, Servant, Word, and Spirit of God.⁴² Among the 90 verses about Jesus in the Qur’an, 64 verses belong to the extended nativity narratives in surahs 3 and 19. This leaves only 26 verses to present the rest of the Jesus story.

Cragg observes:

Sometimes it is said that the New Testament gospels are really passion narratives with extended introduction ... It could be well said that the Jesus cycle in the Qur’an is nativity narrative with attenuated sequel ... Both John and Jesus are heralded in prelude rather than presented in action. The persons of Jesus and Mary are celebrated in Islam but there is little in the Qur’an about the content of Jesus’ teaching, his preaching of the kingdom, the Beatitudes, or the servanthood of the Son of Man. (1985:26)

⁴² The name for Jesus occurs 25 times in the Qur’an and the referring to Jesus by titles numbers an additional ten. The title *Al-Masih* (Messiah) is used to refer to Jesus 11 times in the Qur’an; all of these instances occur in the Medinan surahs. See Parrinder 1965:16-18, 30.

Jesus' sonship relationship to God as Father, his divinity, and the Christian accounts of his crucifixion, death and resurrection are forcefully denied by Muslim scholars and in the Qur'an itself (Surah 4.157-159, Surah 5.17, Surah 5.72, Surah 112).

Cragg summarises the difference between Islamic teaching and Christian doctrine regarding their understanding of Jesus.

Islam registers a profound attraction (to Jesus) but condemns its Christian interpretation. Jesus is the theme at once of acknowledgement and disavowal. Islam finds his nativity miraculous but his incarnation impossible. His teaching entails suffering but the one is not perfected by the other. He is highly exalted but by rescue other than by victory. He is vindicated but not by resurrection. His servanthood is understood to disclaim the sonship which is its secret. His word is scripturalized into the incidence of the Qur'an fragmentarily. He does not pass as personality into a literature possessing him communally. Islam has for him a recognition moving within a non-recognition, a rejectionism on behalf of a deep and reverent esteem. (Cragg 1985:278)

A Christian article of faith that strikes Muslims as puzzling on the one hand and offensive on the other is the affirmation that Jesus is the only begotten son of God. The brief Surah 112 clearly states that God neither begets nor is begotten. This surah may be polemical teaching vis-a-vis Christian doctrine or it may have been aimed against the pagan Arab belief that the daughters of Allah served as intercessors with Allah. The language of generation implying birth, paternity, and sexual relations has been confusing to both Christians and Muslims (Nazir-Ali 1987:130-32). The Greek flavour of classical understandings of Jesus' nature and Neo-platonic categories used by Western theologians do not translate easily into Arabic and Muslim cultures. Jesus often used the 'Son of Man' designation as a more modest title than 'Son of God'. Jesus applied Son and Father language to himself and God (Mark 13:32, Matthew 11:27, and Luke 10:22.) The Gospel of John particularly employs sonship language referring to Jesus as Son of God, only begotten Son, the Son, and his Son.

Cragg is careful to avoid what he calls the 'battlefield language' of sonship although he finds the theme of divine Fatherhood in various portions of the Hebrew scriptures, for example, Malachi 1:6 (If therefore I be a father, where is mine honour?) and Psalm

103.13 (Like a father pities his children so the Lord pities those that fear Him). He understands that this issue is a difficult one for Christian-Muslim dialogue. He does argue, however, that begetting is analogous to sending (Lamb 1997:107).

Cragg asserts that the criteria necessary to purge Mecca of multiple deities prevented any comprehension of Jesus' sonship in a way that fit with monotheism (1985:32). Cragg claims that the language of sonship was the metaphor meant to carry the meaning of 'messiah' as divine presence. The Qur'an uses the language of 'sending' and of 'mission' whereas the New Testament uses the terms 'begetting' and 'sending.' Cragg wonders if Christian interpreters need another filial term that avoids the pitfalls of understanding sonship in physical terms (Cragg 1985:197-206). It would be helpful to see Bailey comment on this issue.

Cragg's twentieth-century plea for creativity applied to translating father and son terminology in the New Testament has generated a robust linguistic and theological dialogue in the twenty-first century. One of the world's largest Bible translation organizations, Wycliffe Bible Translators, has explored the use of alternative terms for 'Son of God' for languages in Muslim and Hindu contexts. Their work seeks to clarify important distinctions among biblical terms used to express divine familial relationships. In most cultures and languages, a distinction exists between biological kinship and social kinship, with an emphasis on one or the other. Wycliffe's academic partner, SIL International, has issued this commentary:

It is important to realize that the Bible uses Greek and Hebrew social familial terms that do not necessarily demand biological meanings. It presents God's fatherhood of us in terms of his inclusion of us in his family and in his paternal care for us as his loved ones rather than in terms of siring us as biological offspring. In regard to sonship to God, the New Testament uses four different Greek familial terms for Jesus, and two for believers, all of which are terms for social sonship, so none of them imply that sons of God must be his biological offspring. Instead the terms allow for the different kinds of generation presented in the Bible.⁴³

⁴³ See SIL's website at http://www.sil.org/translation/divine_familial_terms_commentary_full.pdf for an expanded explanation.

Their careful work has been misunderstood by some Christian interpreters who see the new translation work as a threat to understanding orthodox views of God, Jesus, and Trinity. Concern registered by some western Evangelical parties resulted in a study conducted by The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA).⁴⁴ The study group has published a report (April, 2013) giving guidance to Wycliffe regarding the translation controversy.⁴⁵

The ‘Sonship’ translation discussion and accompanying dialogues take seriously the receptor contexts and the categories of meaning resident in those contexts. Although I would allow more creativity in translating sonship terminology, I salute the careful effort of WEA panel to guide translators by promoting the use of ‘paratext’ to explain terms. The translated term ‘Son of God’ used in some Muslim cultural contexts is often received as something blasphemous, erroneously implying that God had sexual relations with Mary. And, without a prior understanding of the Trinity, it might also communicate that there is more than one God. The meaning of the term Son of God is of vital importance and needs to be communicated clearly and with care so that it is understood in its true and intended meaning.⁴⁶

8.6.3 Sons and Servants

⁴⁴ This researcher wonders if concerns by western donors generated pressure on the WEA and SIL to study carefully the issues surrounding the translation controversy.

⁴⁵ ‘The WEA Panel recommends that when the words for ‘father’ and ‘son’ refer to God the Father and to the Son of God, these words always be translated with the most directly equivalent familial words within the given linguistic and cultural context of the recipients.’ The panel says where the familial words had a sexual implication, the translators should add qualifying adjectives to the familial word rather than change the word itself, using terms like ‘anointed Son of God’ or ‘heavenly Father.’ They also recommend that translators use ‘paratext’ (footnotes or commentary) to explain the terms rather than alter the text itself. The report notes ‘the centrality of the word for “son” in the biblical presentation of salvation,’ and says the centrality ‘demands that translators render the word with the most direct equivalent possible.’ Cf. the full report at http://www.worldea.org/images/wimg/files/2013_0429Final%20Report%20of%20the%20WEA%20Independent%20Bible%20Translation%20Review%20Panel.pdf.

⁴⁶ See http://www.ijfm.org/PDFs_IJFM/28_3_PDFs/IJFM_28_3-BrownGrayGray-NewLook.pdf for the article ‘The Terms of Translation: A New Look at Translating Familial Biblical Terms,’ by Rick Brown, Leith Gray, and Andrea Gray. Other articles on the translation controversy appear in the same issue of *International Journal of Frontier Missions* 28:3.

The most characteristic description of human status in the Qur'an is *abd*, servant or slave, a term so frequent that it is an element in many Muslim names. Cragg says that the Qur'an does not use the term father in relation to God, or children in relation to believers. The terms, of course, require each other but neither is in play in the world of Islam (Cragg 1985:39-41).

The categorical understanding of Jesus as God's son, and derivatively, the notion that Christian disciples are sons and daughters of God, features prominently in Bailey's interpretation of the Luke 15 parable of the two lost sons. The notion of sonship over and against the Islamic category of servanthood, therefore, is a Christian theme offered in Bailey's missional translation of the third Luke 15 parable. Bailey's interpretation connects the hints of incarnation and suffering seen in the humble and costly love shown by the waiting father to the larger ministry and mission of Jesus the son.⁴⁷ Furthermore, Bailey sees the two sons in the third parable acting as servants rather than receiving the father's love as sons. Bailey has linked the Father-Son relationship in the Christian understanding of God with the father-son relationships on display in the parable. Sonship should be seen then as an important theme in the parable with nuances and depth that can be explored fruitfully in Muslim-Christian dialogue.

8.7 Conclusion

Bailey's translation of Luke 15 presents three brief 'Jesus stories' that are imbedded in a New Testament genre called 'gospel'. The Gospel of Luke is itself a narrative that tells the story of Jesus' earthly life and ministry. Like other narratives it has characters and a plot. The plot in Luke and in the other synoptic Gospels tells a story of conflict between

⁴⁷ The Luke 15 parables do not tell the story of Jesus' crucifixion so Bailey and his editorial team cannot depict or refer to the crucifixion or to the resurrection. This Jesus is identified as Saviour and Redeemer, and his titles highlight the atoning sacrifice of the one known also as God's son.

Jesus and the religious authorities of Israel.⁴⁸ The resolution of the conflict is Jesus' death on the cross plus his resurrection and ascension. The three Luke 15 parables are introduced in Luke 15:1-2 with a brief comment about Jesus befriending sinners and the religious leaders grumbling about Jesus' association with such sinners. The parables function at one level as Jesus' answer to the grumblers in the midst of the on-going conflict.⁴⁹

N.T. Wright highlights the prodigal story as a retelling of Israel's grand story of exile and restoration. But Wright notes that Israel went into exile because of self-inflicted folly and disobedience and returns only because of the generous, indeed prodigal, love of God. The real return from exile and the real resurrection from the dead, is taking place, in paradoxical fashion, in Jesus' own ministry (Wright 1996:127). Bailey came to a similar conclusion in a full-length treatment of the Jacob story and its background for Luke 15, *Jacob and the Prodigal: How Jesus Retold Israel's Story* (2003).

Comparing the father who rejoices over a returning prodigal with Jesus' own habit of eating meals with known sinners, may be the intended shock of Jesus' storytelling. The combined presentation of film, drama, and scholarly books shows Bailey's earnest concern to translate the Luke 15 parables highlighting the mercy of God. Bailey sees in the parables, and attempts to show in his retelling, the divine mercy demonstrated in the actions of the shepherd who loses and finds his sheep, the woman who loses and finds a coin, and the father who welcomes home his lost son.

Of the three translation features gleaned from the study of linguistic sources, the ontology and translation feature particularly informs our understanding of what Bailey attempts in his translation of the Luke 15 parables for an Arabic speaking receptor

⁴⁸ See Jack Kingsbury's *Gospel Interpretation: Narrative-Critical and Social-Scientific Approaches* (1997) for essays exploring the fruitfulness of narrative-critical studies of gospel scriptures.

⁴⁹ In his interpretation of the Parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:9-14), Bailey tells the reader to take seriously the narrative introduction to the parable. Luke indicates that Jesus offered the parable to persons who considered themselves righteous and despised others (Bailey 2008:344).

audience.⁵⁰ Humans are always in relationship to others. To be in the world as a person is to be a dialogical being. Human beings are born as sons or daughters of their parents. The parent-child relationship is as fundamental for human identity as gender. These given identities precede other identities of construction and experience. Thus, the two father-son relationships in the final Luke 15 parable are ontological ones. Bailey's translation highlights the understanding of the sons as relating to their father as servants in Jesus' parable. The master-servant relationship is a derivative or a secondary relationship to that of sonship. The two sons are both lost because they have rejected the father's love for them as sons, and they achieve servant status by two different means. The elder son keeps the rules but refuses the entreating love of his father. The younger son breaks the rules by running away from the father's love but devises a plan to return as a servant.

Bailey's work seems consciously aware that a Christian interpretation of the parable bids the reader to draw a parallel between the sons in the story and the identity of Christians who see themselves as sons and daughters of God. In translating this idea for Muslims Bailey emphasises the view that the father seeks to relate to his sons as his children and heirs not as servants who merely do his bidding. His understanding within a Christian category contrasts with a Muslim anthropological category that sees humans as servants of Allah.⁵¹ I believe Bailey has invested in the power of the story to translate across the categories in seeking to offer a gospel story that reflects God's fatherhood linked to human sonship to a receptor audience of Arabic-speaking Muslims.

Moreover, Bailey's use of the Arabic language and Egyptian actors and a Middle Eastern film crew dress the movie in Middle Eastern cultural clothing. Bailey has said that he produced the film primarily to help the Middle Eastern church understand these

⁵⁰ In Chapter Three I discuss: (1) Similarity and difference, that refers to ontology and translation; (2) Transformation that means conversion within the translation process; (3) Multiplicity that means polyglossic or multilingual achievement.

⁵¹ Islam also indicates that Muslims can be 'friends' of God. This designation recalls Abraham's title of 'Friend of God.' See Surah 4.125 and Isaiah 41.8.

stories. He wrote his books as exegetical clarifications of the parables. He is concerned that a traditional understanding of the parables sees the first two stories from an Augustinian perspective and the third parable in a Pelagian light.⁵² In both the lost sheep and the lost coin parables, someone must rescue these lost entities that cannot help themselves. On the other hand, Bailey is concerned that both Muslims and Christians often read the prodigal parable in a way that excludes grace. In such an interpretation the prodigal son comes home of his own accord. He comes to his senses and decides to return without help. Because he reads the stories as parallel treatments of a unified theme, however, Bailey sees the waiting father's love and suffering as a means of searching and drawing the prodigal to return. The mercy of the father is extended through his consistent actions of humble and sacrificial love.

Bailey indicates that his missional intent in his cinematic storytelling to offer the Christian gospel to Muslim persons is secondary. The Arabic film was offered to Middle Eastern Christians who worship and read in Arabic. The license to show the film on state television was secured under the aegis of showing the film in churches and Christian schools.⁵³ Nonetheless, the medium of Arabic film has made available Bailey's translation of the Luke 15 parables to a wider audience, including Arabic speaking persons of various religious traditions. Bailey's attention to details of Middle Eastern culture does help the reader or viewer to understand better the *sitz im Leben* of first-century Palestine. If Bailey fails to achieve balance in his translation it is because he highlights so many elements of the receptor culture. His extensive knowledge of the source texts in the Bible may lead him to register them tacitly without pointing out some of their details. I agree with Bailey's observations and claims that contemporary Arabic cultures in village settings do share aspects with the Palestinian culture of Jesus' day.

⁵² Bailey mentioned his intentions in a private conversation (29 August 2012).

⁵³ Bailey indicated this fact in a private conversation (29 August 2012).

This congruence may be mitigated somewhat, however, by the influences of modernity highlighted by technological changes and the rise of urban communities.

Bailey's work in the Middle East as both teacher and Christian missionary prompted him to experiment with dramatic presentations of Christian themes and biblical stories over much of his career. He collaborated with missionary colleague Jack Lorimer as early as 1962 in Jerusalem. Ewing Bailey, Kenneth's father and an amateur photographer, served as a missionary in Cairo in the 1950s and likely influenced his son to consider using media in mission. Ewing Bailey's vision for a media ministry grew into the Christian Centre for Audio-Visual Services in 1963 (Skreslet 2008:219; Lorimer 2007:47-53).

Polanyi's notion of indwelling describes well what Bailey's missional lifestyle has been for decades. Bailey has indwelt the contemporary Middle Eastern world, or the target culture for the 'Finding the Lost' film, by his more than 35 years of life experience in Middle Eastern settings. He has indwelt the biblical world, or source, as a scholar who was determined to examine the hidden scholarship of ancient Syriac and Arabic sources alongside traditional western sources. I conclude that Kenneth Bailey has carefully sought to pay attention to both the source and receptor as two poles in cross-cultural communication. In bringing both his Middle Eastern and western experiences to bear upon his efforts, Bailey represents a bi-cultural approach to translation. It remains for more time to pass and for additional reporting to reveal how well his missional retelling of the Luke 15 parables is heard and considered in the Arabic speaking world.

CHAPTER NINE

Conclusion

9.1 Introduction

I began this research project animated by an interest in Michael Polanyi's philosophy of knowing and Andrew Walls' intriguing use of 'translation' as a metaphor for missionary transmission of the gospel throughout Christian history. I became interested in the categories and terms that inform an understanding of cross-cultural mission. I wanted to test ideas about translation in to see if a new construct might contribute to the missiological discourse about contextual themes. I believe that ongoing reflection about the missioner's challenge also can contribute ideas toward adopting better practices.

In Chapter Two I argued that contextualisation and its companion phrase, 'contextual theology', have become the most-favored expressions in gospel and culture nomenclature. I found the Roman Catholic writers, Stephen Bevans and Robert Schreiter to be among the most thoughtful and insightful advocates for mission as contextualisation. Schreiter's recent writings also have treated globalisation and reconciliation as missional themes. Bevans' book, *Models of Contextual Theology*, serves mission studies as a primary text, and thus for me, he is the primary theological spokesperson for 'contextualisation'. His more recent books extend his ideas and reflections on the concept of 'theology as contextual'.¹

Reading Andrew Walls, Lamin Sanneh, and Kwame Bediako convinced me that their 'translation metaphor' yields significant implications for mission theology. Walls and Sanneh write primarily as historians, whereas Bediako belongs to the ranks of theologians. I have tested their work on the theme of translation and I have compared it

¹ Cf. *Constants in Contexts* (2004), *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective* (2009), *Contextual Theology for the Twenty-First Century* (2011) and *Prophetic Dialogue* (2011).

to the aforementioned models of contextualisation and inculturation. I have discovered that ‘translation’ is a useful metaphor for doing missiological reflection on the work of communicating the gospel across cultural boundaries. The metaphor becomes more useful, however, in my proposal to expand it by incorporating good features from ‘contextualisation’ and insights from Michael Polanyi’s epistemology.

9.2 Summary and Argument

9.2.1 The Case for Convivial Translation

In testing a new construct of missional translation, I also test a new name for this kind of interpretation: ‘convivial translation.’ Polanyi describes ‘pure conviviality’ as ‘the cultivation of good fellowship [that] predominates in many acts of communication’ (Polanyi 1958:210-11). He goes on to describe a picture of society that exhibits ‘a framework of cultural and ritual fellowship’² (1958:212). Because Polanyi’s notion of conviviality emphasises the importance of persons working together and enjoying a shared experience, the adjective ‘convivial’ seems apt to describe conceptual translation that enjoins the missionary to be jointly engaged with source, receptor, and witness cultures.³ Polanyi sometimes refers to the company of scientific colleagues questing for knowledge as a ‘society of explorers’ (1966b:53). Persons engaged in cross-cultural mission would do well to see themselves as a society of explorers questing to discover words, concepts, practices, rituals, perspectives and redemptive analogies useful for translating the gospel.

i. Testing the Construct: Missional Translation Themes

² Polanyi comments that society’s ‘fellowship reflects four coefficients of societal organizations: (1) sharing of convictions, (2) sharing of a fellowship (3) co-operation, (4) the exercise of authority or coercion’ (1958:212).

³ I mention Polanyi’s notion of ‘conviviality’ and introduce the term ‘convivial’ as a descriptor of missional translation in section 5.5, note 43.

I have utilised six principal themes of ‘mission as translation’ from the work by Walls, Sanneh and Bediako to build the translation metaphor.

1. Jesus’ incarnation is seen as paradigmatic translation (Walls 1996:26).
2. ‘Conversion’ is understood as the turning toward Christ (Walls 1996:29).
3. Christianity (translated) stimulates the vernacular: deep connections are forged between Bible translating and related issues such as cultural self-understanding, vernacular pride, social awakening, religious renewal, cross-cultural dialogue, and reciprocity in mission (Sanneh 1989:52-3, 2009:57-61).
4. Christian identity always belongs at the heart of gospel and culture issues in the conversion situation; ‘one can be African and Christian’ (Bediako 1992:136ff).
5. A role exists for primal or indigenous elements; the convert uses indigenous materials for translating the gospel and Christian theology (Walls 1996:119ff; Bediako 1995:145ff).
6. Each new translation expands the understanding of the gospel, but must bear a ‘family resemblance’ in order to be a faithful translation (Walls 1996:54; Sanneh 2009:244-51).

These themes represent a summary of their chief findings that help missionaries pay attention to the interactions of the Christian gospel amid various cultural contexts. The first five themes are congruent with the models of contextualisation represented by Bevens and Schreiter although Walls articulates distinctive details in his views on ‘conversion’ and ‘incarnation’. Likewise, Sanneh offers particular observations about vernacular translations of the Bible and Bediako contributes unique insights about African promal religions. The sixth theme anticipates future manifestations of gospel understandings and specifies an insight for evaluating a translation in terms of catholicity. The ‘family resemblance’ criterion is a nod to paying sufficient attention to the source and to the universal features of Christian faith.

I have argued that translation differs from both contextualisation and inculturation in its deliberate plan to pay attention in a carefully balanced way to the three poles of translation, that is, source, receptor, and translator cultures. I have contended that theologians Schreiter and Bevens, and many others, articulate contextualisation and inculturation by placing the emphasis upon the receptor culture or context. My translation metaphor deliberately seeks to address paying undue attention to receptors and contexts. At the same time I admit that a missional effort can fail to be balanced by tilting in the source’s direction. Minimising contextual factors or undervaluing praxis also will lead to unbalanced translations (Bevens and Tafaffe-Williams 2011:18ff).

Too much emphasis on experience and/or context can lead to an undervaluing of tradition. Angie Pears is sympathetic to Bevans' work yet calls attention to matters of 'identity and tradition and the relationship between the particular and the universal' in discussing contextual theology (Pears 2010:173-4). She acknowledges the contested place of tradition in liberation theologies and cites Stephen Pattison who argues:

The fact is there is no formal norm. There are all sorts of ways of doing theology ... The moral for the student is that if theologians are so very different in their approaches and cannot agree on what theology is, there can be no right way of doing theology and perhaps one's own way is as good as anyone else's [and] has its own validity and usefulness within one's own situation. (Woodward and Pattison 2000:37-8)

Pattison's contention goes beyond what Bevans or Schreiter suggest and ranges toward the end of the spectrum connoting a relativistic stance in doing theology. The concern for a balanced way of paying attention to source and context can keep in check a tendency to follow the trajectory of a radical contextualisation that eschews norms.

ii. The Translation Hypothesis: Answering the Critique

In Chapter Four I describe the critique Bevans offers about the translation model of contextual theology.⁴ This critique of missional translation is a thoughtful one and deserves careful attention. One difficulty with his critique, however, is that it does not apply in full to the view of translation I find in writings by Walls and his colleagues. Bevans himself assigns the views of Walls to 'The Anthropological Model' (Bevans 2009:175). I have indicated I think Bevans wrongly assigns him to this model.⁵ On the other hand, Kirsteen Kim does associate Walls and Sanneh with Bevans' model. She also expresses reservations about this translation model.⁶

⁴ Bevans critiques the translation model for: (1) an emphasis on a propositional and essentialist gospel; and (2) a naïve view of culture. He argues for the priority of 'present experience' in doing contextual theology. Schreiter argues for (3) an emphasis on indigenous agency described as 'local theology'. See my Chapter Four, pp 160-2. His argument essentially identifies as problematic, the lack of local agency or the need for a deeper encounter with the new culture (Schreiter 1985:9).

⁵ See p 161, note 79.

⁶ First, the supposition that Christianity is limited to a fixed and static text contrasts with a more dynamic interplay of a Living Word and the Holy Spirit. Secondly, this model tends to emphasise the outside missionary's perspective over against indigenous reception and theologising. See Kim 2010, chapter three (Section 3.2, Kindle edition, location 1084).

These two different opinions about linking Andrew Walls' work with a translation model suggests to me that Walls' position defies easy categorisation. Bevans and Schreiter, as well as Kim and also Bergman (2003:87-8), see the notion of 'an essential gospel' as problematic for missional translators. I regard this critique as a valid one for some translator model advocates. Furthermore, I see Walls, Sanneh and Bediako answerable to this objection because their ideas about 'family resemblance' and 'translatability' point to an emphasis on the integrity of the gospel. I admit that there is a danger that someone's description of an essential gospel will ignore contextual concerns and universalise one reading. This is the necessary corrective suggested by calling all theology 'contextual.'

On the other hand, there must be some essential content to what Christians and missionaries recognise as 'the gospel of Jesus Christ', although descriptions of its essence will vary among different Christian communities. The words 'pure' and 'supra-cultural' are hyperbolic and resistant to the nuancing I propose. Other terms like Schreiter's 'catholicity' or Walls 'family resemblance' recognise universal essence without compromising the contextual nature of how the gospel is expressed among peoples in their respective cultures.

The notion of an authoritative or essential gospel message functions to show how a false or distorted gospel may be identified. Andrew Kirk observes,

On the one hand, the gospel message is identifiable in such a way that Christians from all cultures and context can recognise it. It is transmitted in language, and therefore is not culturally independent; nevertheless, it is distinguishable from any and all cultural variants in the sense that a critical dialogue is possible between the Gospel and culture. Unless a separation is possible, there could be no critical engagement and no translation possible. We would not be able to say, for example, where culture betrays the Gospel.⁷

The history of the Nicene Creed includes ecumenical efforts to state Christian essentials about the person of Christ. In 410 CE, the Persian church adopted a Syriac text of the

⁷ Personal conversation with Andrew Kirk (May, 2013). Kirk devotes a chapter to exploring 'the Gospel in the Midst of Cultures' in a book on mission and theology (1999:75-95).

Creed. D. Winkler argues that the West Syriac version of the Creed is the older of two versions that was established at the Synod of Seleucia-Ctesiphon in 410. He comments: ‘The canons were adjusted to meet the needs of the Church of the East, and the creed was altered on the basis of a local Persian creed... The conformity with the Council of Nicaea is expressed in words the Persian fathers deemed adequate for their church’ (Winkler in Baum and Winkler 2003:16-7). Here is an example of theological translation that sought to find an agreement of faith but to express it in different languages and formulae.

I find that Bevans and Roger Schroeder concur about a concept of an essential gospel, although they refer to it by the name ‘constants.’ Their actual statement is: ‘Despite difference of language, context, and culture, there persist as well certain *constants* that define Christianity in its missionary nature’ (Bevans and Schroeder 2004:33). Almost anyone involved in mission or missiology is constrained at some level by the scriptural text and by ecclesiastical tradition.

A second critique about the translation model asserts that it reflects a naïve view of culture. An older and simplistic view of translating messages might assume that all cultures are essentially alike. Anthropologists and linguists today, however, exhibit more care and skill in studying cultures, languages and peoples.⁸ On the other hand, all contextual models and approaches face the difficulty of understanding the dynamics of cultural settings. Theories of culture are numerous and differ widely from each other. Missioners can choose from anthropological or theological views, from instrumentalist or semiotic schemas, or from a combination of such approaches. A missionary might emphasise certain ‘translation elements’, according to Bevans’ schema and minimise others, thus privileging ‘source content’ in the translation dynamic without necessarily

⁸ See Hiebert 2009, Wijzen and Schreiter 2007, Skreslet 2012.

assuming a high degree of cultural parallels. If missionaries follow these tendencies, they are answerable to Bevans' critique.

Bevans' 'translation model' and critique of it is based necessarily on his reading of theological methods and his personal choices about emphases and components. He fits certain mission thinkers and practitioners into his formulated category based on his analysis.⁹ He is not critiquing a consensus argument or practice per se, but his own depiction of it. Some translators and some contextualisers may indeed be guilty of kernel and husk analogy thinking, but they need not adopt this understanding of the relationship between gospel and culture.¹⁰ Friedrich Schleiermacher contributed the pioneering insight that all versions of Christian faith are 'interpreted' versions or 'translated' versions and thus a supra-cultural or supra-historical Christian message does not exist. Indeed, the kernel (faith) and husk (culture) picture betrays a western scientific distinction between 'form' and 'content' (Bosch 1991:422, 454).

A third critique of the translation model is the aforementioned claim that it places more emphasis on missionary agency instead of the activities of local agents. I have noted that Schreiter's brief for 'constructing local theologies' argues theologically that a 'great respect for culture has a Christological basis.' He sees local theologies depending 'as much on finding Christ already active in the culture as it does on bringing Christ to the culture' (Schreiter 1985:29).¹¹ Another way of describing this point of view, is to emphasise the Holy Spirit's missional work in the world revealing Christ in cultures and among the world's peoples. I concur that the *missio Dei* does not depend necessarily

⁹ Krikor Haleblan's 1983 article in *Missiology* describes a translation model similar to those of Schreiter (1985) and Bevans (1992) and links it to the work of Charles Kraft and Eugene Nida. Haleblan sees Kraft adapting Nida's dynamic- equivalence view of Bible translation for the translation model of contextualisation (Habeliam 1983:104). Kraft (2001) does use translation as a metaphor for contextualisation, and he does refer to 'dynamic equivalent' churches. His view of a supracultural gospel, however, is more sophisticated than what Bevans', Schreiter's, and Haleblan's brief comments imply about a 'kernel-and-husk' view of gospel and culture.

¹⁰ Newbigin comments, 'The idea that one can or could at any time separate out by some process of distillation a pure gospel unadulterated by any cultural accretions is an illusion' (1986:4). Sanneh also comments in the negative about separating out a pure gospel (2008:25-6).

¹¹ See pp 156-7.

upon the agency of the Christian Church or the traveling missionary. I also underscore the many comments by Walls, Sanneh and Bediako championing indigenous assimilation of gospel verities and local agency in mission and theology.¹²

I admit that a failure to take seriously local theologies is a historical tendency in translation efforts that needs redress in mission theology (Bediako 1992:234ff). Ironically, I do not see this imbalance in the work of Bediako, Sanneh and Walls.¹³ Bediako and Walls write enthusiastically about primal and indigenous elements in gospel translation.¹⁴ Sanneh charts indigenous assimilation linked to Bible translation efforts. These scholars may represent a commitment to an 'essential gospel' but they do not minimise the cruciality of indigenous reception and agency in communicating the gospel or expressing Christian faith.¹⁵ Sanneh writes about the interactions of missionaries and indigenous Christian agents by highlighting the translation work of African Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Sanneh comments:

Thoughtful missionaries understood that God has preceded them in Africa, as Dr. Livingstone was at pains to point out, that translation involved esteem for the vernacular culture, if not surrender to it, that the authentic forms of culture, consecrated by the elders, constituted the most promising signs for the Christian cause, and that, finally, linguistic investigations and the systematic inventory of indigenous resources were likely to touch off wider and longer-lasting repercussions in the culture. (1989:166-7)

Bevans' views belong to a theological trajectory that runs from Schleiermacher's recognition of situated-ness to liberation theologies, which argue for theology 'from below' and value praxis, social science, and a concern for the marginalised.¹⁶ Bevans invokes liberation insights from Latin American thinkers Jon Sobrino, Juan Luis Segundo, and Leonardo Boff in describing his praxis model.¹⁷ Bevans' praxis model,

¹² See my previous discussions of local agency, pp 54-5, 59, 151.

¹³ In discussing 'conversion' Walls notes indigenous response, reminding the reader that 'as the gospel is dynamic and so are cultural settings so the interactions between the gospel received and its cultural reconfigurations spark a series of complex responses in both directions' (Walls 1996:28-9).

¹⁴ Walls 1996:119-39 and Bediako 1995, 2008.

¹⁵ Walls asserts, 'I believe we can discern a firm coherence underlying all these, and indeed, the whole of historic Christianity. It is not easy to state this coherence in propositional, still less in credal form—for extended credal formulation is itself a necessary product of a particular Christian culture' (1996:23).

¹⁶ Bosch describes contextualisation as one of the elements of an emerging missionary paradigm and links it to both liberation theology and inculturation (1991:423-432, 432-447).

¹⁷ J.L. Segundo offers that a liberation theologian starts with the 'suspicion that anything and everything involving ideas, including theology, is intimately bound up with the existing social situation in an least an

however, diverges from Latin American expressions and evinces a weak emphasis on the givenness of the gospel. Bevans selects Douglas John Hall as a leading representative of this model (2002:79-83).

Bevans' preference for context and experience also has to do with his view of scripture. Bevan's theology finds a starting point in the Bible with creation rather than redemption and sees sacramental good in God's creation and this goodness extends to human cultures or contexts. He also claims hermeneutically, 'it is the *experience* of God through the Scriptures—"on the mountain"—that God reveals Godself; not the Scriptures as such ... at certain times, as I say, Scripture *becomes* God's word'. Bevans also cites theologian Douglas John Hall, 'Faith looks *through* the Scriptures, not at them' [*italics original*] (Bevans 2009:20-22). Bevans writes about locating revelation.

The experience or manifestation of God's presence is found chiefly in three places in our lives: in everyday experience, in the experience of reading or hearing the Word of God in Scripture, and in the experience of the meaning of the Christian Tradition. (Bevans 2009:18)

The emphasis on experience also raises the question of whose experience will be emphasised: that of theologians or that of the worshipping communities? How should individual experience be compared to communal experience? Who determines if contextual *praxis* also is *orthopraxis*? Stackhouse contends that the contextualisation debate has been distorted or reduced to a matter of the relationship between theory and praxis at the expense of failing to consider the role of *poesis*.¹⁸

unconscious way.' He goes on to posit a 'hermeneutical circle' that uses suspicion, both ideological and exegetical, to read the Bible using new elements of data (Segundo 1976:8-9).

¹⁸ Stackhouse turns to Schreier (1985:19) to discuss *poesis* or the poet's work. Schreier claims, 'The poet has the task of capturing those symbols and metaphors which best give expression to the experience of a community.' Stackhouse also raises other concerns about contextualising methods. He asks if *praxis* is the same thing as *orthopraxis*; when does the gospel critique social norms on the basis of justice and other biblical norms? And when does praxis absorb societal structures and practices uncritically. Finally, he wonders if Schreier's tools for contextual analysis used to challenge 'pretentious universalisms end up requiring a new kind of epistemological catholicity at another level...' (Stackhouse 1988:95-105, 109-17).

iii. New Discoveries: Insights from Contextual Missiologists

First, Bevans' emphasis on contextual concerns reminds his readers that every missionary (and everyone) reads the gospel through one's own cultural assumptions and situatedness (Bevans 1992:43). I find it important to learn to regard classic works from the canon of Western thought as contextual rather than universalising. Secondly, Bevans raises useful questions about biblical hermeneutics. On the one hand, he is correct that his identified 'translation representatives' do take the content of the gospel seriously and want to safeguard its doctrinal content. I endorse such a regard for the Scriptures as Christianity's authoritative text. On the other hand, Bevans' critique of translation can function as a warning to avoid hermeneutical practices that represent a kind of biblicism. I recognise that some translation exemplars may have a tendency to place undue emphasis on the propositional content of the biblical text. I affirm a nuanced view of interpreting the Scriptures that considers Nancy Murphy's scholarship and George Lindbeck's work (Murphy 1996, Lindbeck 1984). Both Murphy and Lindbeck seek a middle way between interpretation strategies that range from emphatically propositional to radically experiential. A more recent work by Christian Smith seeks to offer an alternative 'Christocentric hermeneutic' that the author describes as both Evangelical and Catholic (Smith 2012).

Thus, Bevans and Schreiter have helped me to appreciate more deeply the need to understand and respect various perspectives. The label, 'contextual theology,' declares emphatically that every attempt to think theologically is rooted in a contextual particularity. Schreiter's discussion of globalisation reminds me that contexts are constantly changing and are subject to influences located both near and far away.¹⁹ I admire that Schreiter balances his contextual concerns with the need to identify criteria for evaluating inculturation. His book on catholicity has to do with limits or boundaries

¹⁹ Schreiter argues that 'postcolonial and globalization theory, propose cultures as a ground of contests in relations where we struggle with sameness and difference, comparability and incommensurability... (1992:71-2).

of inculturation, combined with an emphasis on the necessity of conversion (Schreier 1999:68-70).

Angie Pears argues that one reason for the emergence of contextual theologies is the unfortunate imposition of western theologies upon different communities without a regard for context. I concur with her assertion that postcolonial theologies arise from a concern to oppose western power and critique colonial and imperial influences in missionary work, Bible interpretation, and theology construction. Pears claims such theologies make use of the discourse of liberation, and she cites theologian Kwok Pui-lan.

As colonial desire and imperialistic violence were masked and reconstituted in a blatant reversal of 'civilizing mission', the Christian church played important roles through the sending of missionaries, establishing churches and schools, and propagating ideas of cleanliness and hygiene. Christianization and Westernization became almost a synonymous process in the colonial period. (Kwok Pui-lan 2005:17)

R. S. Sugirtharajah claims that a postcolonial approach can encourage a strategy of what Edward Said calls 'contrapuntal reading', where the exploiter and exploited share their experiences (Sugirtharajah 2003:16). Polanyi's appreciation of conviviality stimulates me to seek venues where those who are not like-minded can meet and converse. Convivial translation requires dialogue partners and collaborators to produce translations that comprehend both the 'text' and the 'context'. I appreciate postmodern and postcolonial critiques that take seriously the cultural captivity of the Christian message when it is imprisoned in the words and deeds of the colonial witness or in some other poor translation.²⁰ Yet I also find helpful a cautionary distinction made by philosopher Charles Taylor, who views 'language as world-disclosing and world-constituting but not world-creating' (1985:234). This view reflects the idea that

²⁰ See the historical assessments by Brian Stanley (ed), *Missions, Nationalism and the End of Empire* (2003), and Brian Stanley, *The Bible and the Flag: Protestant Missions and British Imperialism in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (1990).

language constructs social reality but as a secondary construction within the archetypal creation of language given to humans as a gift from God.²¹

9.2.2 Concluding Thoughts on Translation

My view of translation charts a middle way between a naïve understanding of translation that over-emphasises the source and a radical contextualisation that over-emphasises the context. Although I quibble with Bevans' translation model, I readily admit that missionaries in past generations privileged the source, assumed a simplistic view of culture, and failed to study the intricate contours of a receptor culture. The simplistic picture of the Victorian missionary wearing his pith helmet and lugging a piano across the seas is a caricature, but, nonetheless, it displays historical elements of truth.

Regarding the church as 'a universal hermeneutic community' in which various Christian communions check one another is one strategy for seeking a balanced approach to translation (Bosch 1991:457). My convivial view of translation, informed by Polanyian insights, endorses a way of affirming both the church's 'essential continuity' and its capacity to become incarnate in diverse settings. I contend that any Christian, insider or outsider, becomes engaged in the work of translation when offering words and deeds of witness.

I argue that in the enterprise of Christian mission, only God is supra-contextual or supra-cultural, and only God stands outside of creation as Creator. Culture is not only a human construct, but it is so in a derived sense as part of the created order. Human construction of languages, customs, and rituals are possible only because God has gifted and enabled human beings to build communities and societies. Humans are communal and communicative as they reflect the *imago Dei*. The Christian gospel is a universal

²¹ Berger and Luckman (1967:149ff) construe 'conversation' as a primary category for expressing and transmitting a community's point of view.

story that can be transmitted into many cultures. I resist calling the gospel supra-cultural because the person, work, and story of Jesus, the incarnate One, come to us imbedded in the first-century context of Palestine. It is not culture bound because of its inherent translatability. God's good news is what addresses cultures, critiques cultures, and finds a home in cultures.

9.3 Polanyian Insights

9.3.1 Discovery, Universal Intent, and Fiduciary Framework

Michael Polanyi's academic journey began in the science labs before coming to the philosophical sub-discipline of epistemology. He was motivated to search, explore, and discover meaning, and to continue his heuristic journey by explaining, validating, and articulating his findings. According to Henri Poincare's research on problem solving, the first stage or 'discovery' involves selecting a good problem to solve. Polanyi claimed that behind such a choosing lay a 'vision of a hidden reality, which guides the scientists in his quest, [and] is a dynamic force' (1966b:86). Selecting a good problem or a relevant question to answer invites contemplation of other problems and prompts further research. Poincare's second stage involves reflecting, exploring, experimenting and hypothesising. A third stage ushers in the 'eureka moment' when a researcher finds the answer or solves the problem. Finally, the researcher articulates the findings and publishes them so that others can comment and verify the results.

Polanyi refers to his reliance upon both a hidden reality waiting to be discovered and a scientist's claim that the discovered results are universally valid.

Research is conducted on these terms from the start and then goes on groping for a hidden truth toward which our clues are pointing; and when discovery terminates the pursuit, its validity is sustained by a vision of reality pointing still further beyond it. Having relied throughout his enquiry on the presence of something real hidden out there, the scientist will necessarily rely on that external presence also for claiming the validity of the result that satisfies his quest... [the scientist] will likewise recognise the authority that guided him. On the grounds of the self-command which bound him to the quest of reality, he must claim that his results are universally

valid; such is the universal intent of a scientific discovery. I speak not of universality, but of universal intent, for the scientist cannot know whether his claims will be accepted; they may be true and yet fail to carry conviction... To claim universal validity for a statement indicates merely that it ought to be accepted by all. The affirmation of scientific truth has an obligatory character which it shares with other valuations, declared universal by our own respect for them. (Polanyi 1966b:92-93)

For the missionary translator, the hidden reality corresponds to Andrew Walls' 'full stature of Christ' waiting to be revealed. To claim universal validity for a statement calls to mind Walls' notion of the 'family resemblance'. Polanyi explains that a scientist assimilates 'the framework of science' and relies on scientific achievements that have preceded the scientist's own work. Relying on this framework or a tool is 'a personal commitment which is involved in all acts of intelligence by which we integrate some things subsidiarily to the centre of our focal attention' (Polanyi 1958:61). Likewise, a missionary also indwells a framework or tradition of belief by personal commitment and experience. A missionary-translator identifies a problem—how to communicate the 'hidden reality' of the Christian gospel in terms understandable to a target audience. The translator's creative imagination will guide her intuitively to identify unspecifiable clues and to integrate them into a gospel pattern for sharing with others.

9.3.2 The Tacit and Indwelling

I have argued that the missionary will do well to apply Polanyi's tacit knowing theory as a heuristic tool in doing convivial translation. Invoking the tacit dimension, Polanyi's theory distinguishes between a human knower's focal awareness and subsidiary awareness. The fusion or integration of subsidiary clues is not a deduction but an act that involves the intersection of two dimensions: the awareness dimension and the activity dimension (Polanyi 1958:212). The interaction between subsidiary awareness and bodily activity gives rise to tacit knowing. Polanyi's theory of knowing offers his readers a mindset and provides language and categories useful for doing missional translation. He shows the translator how to pay attention, how to attend from one or

more subsidiary elements to a focal entity, how to evaluate and validate knowledge claims, and how to integrate particulars into patterns.

For example, in Chapter Six I present a case study featuring the Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Dream of the Rood (DR)*. The *DR* serves to illustrate Polanyian insights because of the interaction of its diverse use of images combined with its thematic focus upon the cross of Christ. The cross is a tree (recalling Eden's tree of life); then it becomes a rood (an instrument of death); and finally it is transformed into a shining beacon ('I am the light of the world; you are the light of the world'). The poem inscribed on the Ruthwell Cross (RC) combines the cross narrative in Old English, with the figural sculptures of gospel scenes identified by fragmentary Latin inscriptions. Polanyi's notion of the tacit interplay of subsidiary and focal elements is a helpful heuristic tool in understanding how the *DR* and the RC reflect vernacular Christianity plus influences from several witness cultures. The architect of the 'cross monument' artfully combined a melange of cultural elements to make a gospel presentation that focuses on Christ's cross and salvific death, yet tacitly includes 'living motifs' of vine-scroll and the Tree of Life. One commentator, echoing Johannine themes, wonders if the Tree of Life overshadows the rood of death.

In a single unifying image the sculptural decoration of the narrow sides reveals Christ to be the Tree of Life, that is, the axis of the centre of the world joining heaven and earth and providing spiritual food and healing for all. The Tree rises to the height of the towering shaft on both sides and is shown in the form of a rooted vine-scroll filled with diverse creatures feeding on its fruit. It regenerates a Mediterranean image of the incorporation of all the faithful members of the Church into the sacramental and glorified body of Christ.²² (O'Reilly 2003:153)

Polanyi's concept of indwelling represents a significant heuristic framework. Knowing is a kind of indwelling, where persons utilise a framework for pursuing meaning, which begins with the body but can be extended using a tool or probe to explore the environment beyond the body. Polanyi explains, 'to use language in speech, reading and writing, is to extend our bodily equipment and become intelligent human

²² See John 15:1-5; John 6:56.

beings' (1974:148). Polanyi also referred to indwelling as occurring when we 'interiorize these things and make ourselves dwell in them', and finally he claims that

such extensions of ourselves develop new faculties in us; our whole education operates in this way; as each of us interiorizes our cultural heritage, he grows into a person seeing the world and experiencing life in terms of this outlook. (1974:148)

Polanyian 'indwelling' is on display in my Chapter Eight case study that evaluates Kenneth Bailey's gospel presentation of the Luke 15 parables. Bailey grew up in the Middle East, the son of western missionaries. He received his higher education degrees in the United States but lived in Middle Eastern villages and is at home speaking English or Arabic. He has indwelt Middle Eastern contexts as a stranger, guest, outsider and insider. The missionary adapts and begins to indwell the new setting. The missionary as bicultural observer and participant learns to see from two perspectives. Bailey's indwelling experiences positioned him to play both insider and outsider roles.

Polanyi has introduced an understanding of knowing based on appreciating the roles of 'the body, the society of knowing agents and the affirmation of our cognitive powers of judgment' (Gill 2000:30-46). Polanyi succinctly describes tacit knowing as 'relying on our awareness of something (A) for attending to something else (B)' (1958:xiii). How does one possess and make use of awareness? Polanyi's scientific experience helped him conclude that persons have varying degrees of intuition and imagination, but they can cultivate the skills necessary for developing such awareness.

He wrote about learning from experts under the heading of connoisseurship (Polanyi 1958:54). A master can teach a student how to pay attention to necessary elements and learn how to grade cotton or taste wine like the experts do (1958:53-4).²³ Paying attention to the tacit dimension is crucial for learning and knowing. Such awareness and skill in paying attention will help the missionary who is learning to communicate in

²³ Polanyi spent time at the docks in Manchester observing how the cotton-classers used their skills to assess grades of cotton. I confirmed this account of Polanyi's research in Manchester via a personal conversation with Ruel Tyson in 2005.

terms that benefit the other. It might sound counter-intuitive to pay attention to those things that are subsidiary, yet the work of attending from and to less obvious clues leads to the ability to shift one's focal awareness. Seeing how an observer focuses on one subject by attending to another can reveal the complex interaction of multiple factors in a causal chain. The same holds for perception. If the Christian gospel exists as a pattern of elements that can be translated across cultural boundaries, then the translator wants to learn how to pay attention to those elements and to the focal pattern that integrates such elements.²⁴

The theologian, Janet Soskice, links love and attention as necessary for morality and religion. She borrows from philosopher Iris Murdoch who says the world calls for our attention and defines attention as 'a just and loving gaze directed upon an individual reality' (Soskice 2007:9). Over against the modern agent of science, who might act through disengagement and objectification, Soskice argues for the personal agent 'to be involved, embodied, and attentive. 'To be fully human and to be fully moral', she continues, 'is to respond to that which demands our response—the other, attended to with love' (Soskice 2008:26). I find that briefly stated idea, 'attending to the other with love,' a précis of the missionary's intention. The Christian witness or translator brings a message of God's love to the other. Polanyi helps us understand that the creative scientist or translator works by being involved, embodied and attentive.

The apostle Paul sought to help the Corinthian church apply gospel teachings to their lifestyles lived among their pagan neighbors. One set of issues had to do with meat sacrificed to idol, meat sold in the marketplace, and social dining in pagan temples, which functioned like contemporary restaurants. Paul's exhortations reveal that he paid

²⁴ I heard a missionary give an account of the history of Bible translation for an island people group in the Pacific. At first the translators presented the tribal chief with versions of the Gospels of Mark and John without any visible results. When offered a translated version of the Gospel of Matthew, the chief exclaimed with delight and comprehension. It seems that the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew, chapter 1, helped him conclude that the Jesus figure came from somewhere in time and history. Although some Bible readers might dismiss a genealogy as an inconsequential list of names, this village leader found in an arguably tacit portion of the gospel a revelatory key to unlock the story's impact.

careful attention to OT wisdom, to his firsthand hearing and interpretation of the Jerusalem Council decision, and to his understanding of the situation in first-century Corinth. He concluded that how meat was butchered and where it was sold need not restrict the Corinthians' consciences. On the other hand, to dine in pagan temples was to court the evil influence of demonic spirits, and he counseled the Corinthians to stay away from places dangerous to spiritual health. Paul effectively offers ethical advice in his epistle (1 Corinthians), from particulars of wisdom he has integrated into an ethical pattern for the Corinthian context. He translated one from one pattern (OT dietary restrictions) through other patterns (missionary experience, Apostolic Decree) to a new configuration appropriate for dining practices in pagan Corinth.

9.4 Translation Features

9.4.1 Introduction

In Chapter Three I identified three features of missional translation I discovered in doing research on linguistics. I now link them with the findings of the missional scholars I have studied. The first feature, 'similarity and difference', aligns with an emphasis on identity associated with Kwame Bediako's theology. African Christians share similar faith convictions with other Christian believers but display differences in terms of particular languages, culture, and heritage. The second feature, 'transformation', connects with Andrew Walls' writings on translation and conversion that implies a transformed life and worldview. The third feature is described by the word, 'multiplicity'. The influence of Bible translation on vernacular cultures, studied by Lamin Sanneh, means the gospel has come to be expressed in many cultures as a 'polyglossic' mosaic of world Christianity.

9.4.2 Similarity and Difference

Wilhelm von Humboldt in *die Form der Sprach* suggests that language forms a weaving of similarities. If language is like a weaving, then ‘similarity’ represents the knot or infilling that forms the weft. Without similarity relations in its structure, language would be only a simple aggregation. After citing von Humboldt, Stefano Arduini concludes, ‘In short, similarity is the *Dasein* (being) of language. Without similarity language does not exist’ (2004:10-11).

Translation often focuses on similarity maps and employs the concepts of metaphor and analogy. The ability to see something as something else or to articulate something in other terms is an essential feature of human cognition. Equivalence may be construed as a form of similarity, but similarity as a concept falls short of ‘sameness’ or equality that is implied in both formal and functional notions of equivalence. Translation depends on recognizing what Ludwig Wittgenstein describes as ‘family resemblances’, namely, ‘a complicated network of similarities overlapping and crisscrossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail’ (Tymoczko 2004:35-6).²⁵

Human beings are strikingly similar yet manifest great variety in language, lifestyle, culture, and history. The diversity of human languages mirrors the enormous variety displayed among cultures and ethnic communities.²⁶ The world’s linguistic communities display diverse histories, patterns of conduct, beliefs and values, and other aspects of culture.

²⁵ Tymoczko contends that a fruitful way to articulate ‘similarity in translation’ is to focus on translation as a ‘metonymic process.’ Metonym is a figure of speech in which an attribute or an aspect of an entity substitutes for the entity or in which a part substitutes for the whole. Because a translator can never translate everything in a source text each translator must privilege certain aspects or parts of the source text to transfer. Deciding on which elements or parts to transfer, for example, semantic meanings, forms, and structure, requires a translator to determine either consciously or unconsciously similarity criteria (2004:36-7).

²⁶ *The Ethnologue* reports approximately 6800 languages in use at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Grimes 2000:846).

Andre Lefevre believes the most important problem for translators (especially western translators) is to achieve a better understanding of non-western cultures and the grids formed in those cultures. Thus, in order for a missionary to translate effectively, for Lefevre, the translator must appreciate ‘difference’ for understanding or composing for the other (Bassnet and Trivedi 1999:75-7).

Kwame Bediako’s theological work exploring ‘Christian identity’ dovetails with the theme of similarity or difference. Bediako studies the translation strategies of Tatian, Tertullian, Justin, and Clement, and notes their attempts to express Christian identity in ways that made sense in Barbarian and Hellenistic cultures. Then Bediako studies the same ‘Christian identity’ question in modern Africa through the theologies of B. Idowu, J. Mbiti, M. Musharhamina, and B. Kato. Bediako’s work raises important questions about how ‘the African primal imagination’ evinces continuity or discontinuity with the gospel of the Christian scriptures. Continuity and discontinuity closely resemble similarity and difference (Bediako1992:427-34).

Kenneth Bailey’s film presentation of the prodigal son parable reflects a striking connection to this translation and ontology theme. Questions of identity, particularly played out in the father’s relationships to his two sons, resonates in extended reflections on the differences between Christianity and Islam. I highlight the identity distinction in terms of sonship and servanthood that is faithful to Bailey’s translation.

9.4.3 Transformation

Transformation, the second feature of missional translation, affects both the missionary as translator and the recipient of a translated message. The translator is changed by the journey of crossing over a boundary in the work of translating.²⁷ Translation proper (interlingual) implies interpretation. To translate is never simply to decodify or to

²⁷ Peter’s attitudinal transformation in his encounter with Cornelius is narrated in Acts 10.

recodify. Such operations are part of the translation process but do not exhaust it, which is contrary to a simple kernel and husk view of gospel and culture. The work of translation is the work of interpreting, and interpretation gives life beyond moment and place of immediate utterance or transcription (Steiner 1975:27). The experience of the effective translator becomes one of transformation as more than one culture challenges the understandings of the missionary acting as translator. The translating effort ultimately will change the missionary's understandings of the source, of witness, and of the receptor, as the missionary engages in dialogue among languages and cultures.

The receptor individual or community undergoes change by receiving the translated message. Ernst August-Gutt contends that 'relevance' brings out with new clarity the unique mandate of translation vis-a-vis other modes of interlingual expression. A translator does not simply repeat the same ideas that an author has articulated, but presents those ideas as an expression of what that person communicated (Sperber and Wilson 1995:238). This inferential model of communication highlights that a receptor's capacity to hear a communicated message, depends in part on seeing the message as important or relevant. Steiner invokes Martin Heidegger's 'we are what we understand' to indicate that a receptor's being is modified by each instance of appropriation. Steiner continues,

No language, no traditional symbolic set or cultural ensemble imports without risk of being transformed. Here two families of metaphor, probably related, offer themselves, that of sacramental intake or incarnation and that of infection. (1975:315)

Andrew Walls emphasises the link between translation and transformation by explaining that translation resembles conversion. In linguistic translation, language is the vehicle, and the traditions represent a deposit. Translation like conversion has a beginning but no end. Social life and language change, and translation must keep pace. Because 'the principle of translation is the principle of revision', the translations of Christ that occur as persons in various cultures turn toward Christ, are 're-translations'

(1996:29). New translations are contingent upon the original incarnation, and new translations invite comparison with the original. On the other hand, each translation, like conversion, takes the original into new territory and potentially expands it. Diversity because of transformation is balanced by coherence as each new translation bears resemblance to the common original (Walls 1996:27-8).

The Chapter Six case study presents how the apostle Paul navigated the Corinthian marketplace and pagan temples to advise Gentile Christians on proper dining habits. Paul's epistolary advice displays the consequences of conversion and ongoing transformation. He understands how the eating restrictions of the old covenant must change with freedom in Christ. Thus, he interprets how both the reality of the spirit world and the imperative of neighbour love, challenge the Corinthian believers to gain new perspectives about social practices.

9.4.4 Multiplicity

The third feature of missional translation recognizes that the gospel is continually being expressed and offered in multiple languages. In a polyglossic world, how shall these similar yet different versions of Christianity relate to one another? Physicist David Bohm writes of dialogue as a way of working towards understanding, and as a way of suspending preconceptions that tend toward fragmentation. An understanding of an underlying whole does not imply different standpoints do not exist, but enable each point of view to become explicit within a dialogic atmosphere. This way of seeing reminds one of Polanyi's vision of relating tacit particulars and integrated wholes. Such vision allows each to be seen as part of a greater whole and helps persons see their own governing thoughts more clearly when contrasted with those of others. The dialogue then becomes a space in which what is tacit, and therefore possibly unnoticed or unquestioned, can be brought to the attention of self and others in an explicit and focal

way (Bohm 2004:16; Fawcett 2010:3). Polanyi's notion of the tacit dimension gives us categories and language to reflect on this dynamic.

Homi Bhaba follows Walter Benjamins in the notion that no culture or language is 'full unto itself' (Fawcett 2010:3-4). A polyglossic gospel bids translators and missiologists to recognise that facets of the gospel may still lie hidden until dialogue and new expressions bring them to the surface. Translations add to the collected body of expressions or interpretations (speech acts) of ideas, narratives, and performatives. The enterprise of missional translation is a cumulative process whereby the church adds to its translated expressions of the gospel and understandings of Jesus. If Darrell Guder is right that every translation inevitably is a reduction, then it benefits us to have multiple translations and to set them alongside each other to derive a more complete picture of the gospel of Jesus Christ.²⁸

The translator deals in multiplicity, and each expression of the gospel informs all the others as dialogue occurs and extends in space and time. Every translation is evaluated and appreciated alongside the commonality indicated in the Letter to the Ephesians.

The Ephesian metaphors of the temple and of the body show each of the culture-specific segments as necessary to the body but as incomplete in itself. Only in Christ does completion, fullness, dwell ... None of us can reach Christ's completeness on our own. We need each other's vision to correct, enlarge, and focus our own; only together are we complete in Christ. (Walls 2002a:79)

Lamin Sanneh's study of Bible translation charts the effects of vernacular translation in several settings: the Jewish-Gentile frontier, Spanish missions in the New World, the Niger Delta, and the King James project in England. These examples prompt his belief that Christians have a great pluralist heritage and must use their flexible approach of translatability to foster this pluralism rather than oppose it (Sanneh 1989:6). Sanneh concludes from his study that,

²⁸ Guder lists several reductions of the gospel in history, that is, reducing Jesus' message to a set of ideas, reducing the notion of Christianity to one religion among many, reducing the church as a movement to that of an institution and more (2000:101-104).

The Christian missionary impact has created a worldwide pluralist movement distinguished by the forces of radical pluralism and social destigmatization, spread out on a massive arc at the center of which mission placed “the true and living God” of the disciples.’ (1989:234)

This pluralism becomes a ‘prerequisite for authentic Christian living, since translation assumes cross-cultural encounter where the notion of multiple living cultures makes it necessary to exchange one form of communication for another’ (Sanneh 1989:233).

In Chapter Seven the case study drawn from an episode in Christian history explores the gospel message conveyed by an Anglo-Saxon poem, *The Dream of the Rood*. The creator of the poem evinces a familiarity with multiple expressions of the Christian gospel. Celtic, Roman, Mediterranean, and Anglo-Saxon influences are evident in the full text of the poem; especially when the poem is considered alongside the figural motifs and Latin fragments that comprise the Ruthwell Cross.²⁹ The dramatic dream poem represents an early Anglo-Saxon presentation of the Christian gospel in an era of cross-cultural collisions and combinations. It is a polyglossic gospel on display in Northumbria during an age of monastic mission.

9.5 The Way Forward

9.5.1 Categories

My interest in studying missiological terms extends to developing categories for describing cross-cultural mission. A map or a model is a type of category for charting a course or describing a sequence. I initiated this project invoking a Polanyian ‘discovery’ metaphor resolving to draw a map for gospel into culture interpretation. I have described that map as ‘convivial translation.’ Convivial translation bids the missionary to pay attention to gospel patterns in three locations. The first pattern is the gospel source;

²⁹ Celtic manuscripts included aesthetic motifs like carpetpages, curvilinear script, and majuscules. Michelle Brown, however, believes that the Northumbrian vinescrolls were symbolic of the Eucharist and often were inhabited by beasts that bore symbolic meanings (1991:58-60). Ó Carragáin chronicles the history of interpretation of the Ruthwell Cross and convincingly argues that the accompanying *tituli* in Latin and runes help to interpret the figures on the four sides of the cross (2005:47-54).

the Word written and incarnate as interpreted through the traditions of the church's witness in the world. The second pattern is the gospel as assimilated into the missionary's own culture or cultures. The third pattern takes shape for the missionary, as the gospel assumes a pattern in a receptor culture or context. A map helps to show the way or sequence of working among the three sets of patterns. Conceptual mapping, according to Richard Trim, 'represents the different kinds of transfers which operate between one cognitive domain and another and which result in the various types of mapping constructs found in language' (Trim 2011:4, 10).

For his work describing models of contextual theology, Stephen Bevans borrows from ideas in the works of Ian Barbour, Sallie McFague, and Avery Dulles. Dulles offers the view that 'a model is a relatively simple, artificially constructed case which is found to be useful and illuminating for dealing with realities that are more complex and differentiated' (Dulles 1988:30). Bevans' use of models features methods of theologising that vary according to theological presuppositions. Conceptualisation and categorisation are key concepts for understanding how linguistic-cultural communities view their worlds and define social identities, relationships, religious practices, and ideologies. The mission-translator must, therefore, pay careful attention to these categories.

An intriguing category for exploring the work of interpreting the gospel cross-culturally is the notion of metaphor.³⁰ A 'metaphor' describes one thing in terms of another.³¹ By bringing two signs together in a single comparison, new levels of meaning are given to both. Janet Soskice contends that metaphorical description 'refers and depicts' but does not claim to define. An accumulation of descriptions of the gospel

³⁰ I discuss briefly J. Begbie's application of Polanyian ideas on metaphor in chapter 5, p. 154.

³¹ I. A. Richards distinguishes between the 'tenor' and the 'vehicle' of metaphor, the tenor being the conceptual meaning and the vehicle being the concrete comparison' (Richards 1965:96ff). Paul Avis contends it may be difficult to determine which aspect is primary and which is secondary. He speaks then of 'the occasion of the metaphor and the image through which we view the occasion' (Avis 1999:94).

from various cultural locations, therefore, can be joined to describe Christian verities from multiple points of view. Paul Fiddes supposes that between the objects compared, ‘there is room for vibrations of undertones and overtones’³² (Fiddes 2013:2).

Polanyi intriguingly links integration (a term he uses regarding a knower bringing clues together in perception), tacit knowing, and metaphor. Polanyi saw that a work of art reflects an artist’s background and experiences (tacit) and draws upon the apprehender’s experience and imagination to achieve an integrated mediation. I envision the translator of the gospel involved in a similar dynamic. Particular features of a work of art mediate meaning to the apprehender. In discussing ‘validity’ in art, Polanyi compares and contrasts art to science. He makes helpful distinctions but I wonder if his scientific paradigm sometimes functions too heavily as his default starting point (Polanyi and Prosch 1975:156). His linking of the tacit dimension and metaphor, however, merits more discussion. Likewise, exploring the various understandings of the concept of metaphor vis-a-vis translation is an arena for further study.³³

9.5.2 Epistemology

My exploration of translation and my application of Michael Polanyi’s philosophy as a heuristic tool belong to the discipline of epistemology, a sub-discipline of philosophy that is concerned with knowing and knowledge. Personal knowing is influenced by language, culture, and cultural change. Lesslie Newbigin’s study of Polanyi’s philosophy addresses questions of how Enlightenment thinking impacted Christian faith and mission in the twentieth century. Newbigin’s thoughtful analysis of gospel-into-culture questions has prompted mission scholars to be more aware of epistemological implications for interpreting the gospel into various settings. Few book-length treatments about mission and epistemology are available. Two notable ones were

³² Fiddes’ terminology of undertones and overtones invokes the Polanyian distinction of tacit and focal attention.

³³ See fuller treatments of metaphor by Soskice 1985; Lakoff and Johnson 1980; and Lakoff 1987.

published in 1999.³⁴ In his work on mission and Western knowledge claims, Andrew Kirk comments on the theme of similarity and difference. Knowledge claims and questions reflect priorities and starting points. Since I already have highlighted ‘similarity and difference’ as a feature of translation, reflecting on a beginning point for discussion is pertinent.

Current discussion of the value and place of culture tends to emphasize difference. Why should difference be valid as the starting-point? Why not accentuate a common humanity across racial and ethnic boundaries—a commonality which is not the theoretical conclusion of some esoteric anthropological idea, but one rooted in real life experience? (Kirk and Vanhoozer 1999:238)

Schreier also poses the question whether one begins with ‘inculturation of faith’ or ‘identification with culture’.³⁵ Robert Schreier exhibits an ongoing interest in epistemological questions in his scholarship. He explores semiotics as a discipline within linguistics that is useful for studying culture (Schreier 1985:49ff). He also discusses intercultural hermeneutics and epistemology in light of Ricoeur and Foucault (Schreier 1997:39ff). These authors belong to a small set of mission thinkers exploring philosophical themes. More missiological reflection is needed on matters of epistemology and culture.³⁶

9.5.3 *Global Voices and Globalisation*

World Christianity is an example of how the twenty-first century evinces globalisation both as extension and compression. On the one hand, globalisation is a homogenising process that reflects global markets, higher education and lingua francas (Schreier 1997:8, Kim and Kim 2008:11-12). Globalisation also is a relational concept in which technologies have reduced distances and time, enabling interactions and contacts far and

³⁴ They are, *To Stake a Claim: Mission and the Western Crisis of Knowledge* (Kirk and Vanhoozer, 1999) and *Missiological Implications of Epistemological Shifts: Affirming Truth in a Modern/Postmodern World* (Hiebert, 1999).

³⁵ See p 52.

³⁶ Jan Jongeneel reflects on ‘missology [as] an academic discipline’ and laments that ‘many missiologists have neglected the philosophy of mission...’ Jongeneel defines the philosophy of mission as ‘the logical study of missionary and missiological concepts, arguments, and language...’ (Jongeneel 1998:27-32).

wide (Kalu 2010:25). In my introduction I identified complexity exemplified by global forces as a challenge for religious discourse. The globalisation of Christianity serves as a change agent³⁷ and an opportunity for inter-faith dialogue and mutual learning.

A related subject is the need to engage more voices in discussions of contextual themes; I refer to this theme in noting the ideas of Walls and Sanneh³⁸ and in discussing the translation feature I call multiplicity. The non-Western growth of world Christianity manifestly implies that academic theology needs more African, Asian, and Latin American scholars. Libraries, universities, seminaries, and publishing houses in the Western world vastly outnumber those in the rest of the world. ‘But the change in Christianity’s centre of gravity has still greater implications for Christian scholarship... The global transformation of Christianity requires nothing less than the complete rethinking of the church history syllabus’ (Walls 1996:145). ‘If the churches of these continents [Africa, Asia, and South America] do not produce theological leadership, the principal theatres of Christian mission in the century now opening will languish in confusion’ (Walls 2002b:181). Kwame Bediako has pushed ahead in this endeavor by creating a notable mission study centre in Ghana, the Akrofi-Christaller Institute, and by publishing a pioneering journal, the *Journal of African Christian Thought* (JACT).

9.6 Conclusion

9.6.1 Dialogue and Identity

Martin Conway suggests that ‘the more the Tradition is expressed in varying terms of particular cultures, the more will its universal character be fully revealed (Conway 1995:133). He promotes mutuality and discerning commonality that invokes the related

³⁷ Schreiter has written extensively about globalisation and mission. He identifies new narratives of secularisation and the increase in the number of young people as global challenges for mission. (Schreiter 2010:17-24)

³⁸ See discussion about Sanneh and ‘world Christianity’ on pp 131-32. Cf Walls’ comments in Section 4.2.7 about the locus of theological creativity in the non-Western world.

theme of dialogue. Dialogue as a missional category implies mission must take account of the other and engage people of other living faiths or non-Christians in respectful conversation. This is a much-discussed theme but merits continued attention and the enlistment of more participants.³⁹ Stanley Skreslet argues that dialogue is not seen as a method of mission, but dialogue belongs to ‘the religions’ since interfaith dialogue responds to the undeniable evidence of religious pluralism. On the other hand, The World Council of Churches’ (WCC) San Antonio Report declares, ‘We affirm that witness does not preclude dialogue but invites it, and that dialogue does not preclude witness but extends it and deepens it’ (Wilson 1990:32). Andrew Kirk poses a question about intercultural communication, ‘What is the relation in communication between proclamation, dialogue, and testimony?’ (Kirk and Vanhoozer 1999:239). The missional translator asks the same question in discerning appropriate methods for engaging the other with the offer of good news. Pronouncements of the Roman Catholic Church include a statement in *Dialogue and Mission*:

Dialogue is ... the norm and necessary manner of every form of Christian mission, as well as of every aspect of it, whether one speaks of simple presence and witness, service or direct proclamation. Any sense of mission not permeated by such a dialogical spirit would go against the demands of true humanity and against the teachings of the gospel. (*Dialogue and Mission* (29) in Skreslet 2012:152)

Dialogue also can be internal to the church’s discussions as it guides theologians within the circle of faith. Bevans and Schroeder argue that ‘prophetic dialogue’ represents a synthesis of the three major theologies of mission: *missio Dei*, liberation, and proclamation. They develop this idea as a term for a comprehensive theology of mission—each element of mission is construed as both dialogical and prophetic (Bevans and Schroeder 2011:2). Kevin Vanhoozer calls for ‘dialogical systematics’ as a way of expressing the need for Christian theology to enlarge ‘faith’s understanding by mutual

³⁹ I discuss this theme earlier in Chapter Three. I also reference the following sources in Chapter Six. See the treatment of ‘dialogue and witness’ in David Singh, *The Word Made Flesh: Community, Dialogue and Witness* (2011:15-17). See also David Bosch’s discussion of ‘dialogue’ (1991:483-9) within the larger section ‘Mission as Witness among People of Living Faiths’ (1991:474-89).

conversation that moves past the old European and Western monologue and across cultural boundaries' (2006:119-20).

Both Homi K. Bhaba and Mikhail Bakhtin write about dialogue from the point of view of literary studies. Their work considers 'hybridities' or third spaces for people to meet and converse (Bhaba 1994:53-56, Bakhtin 1981:358-66, 429). 'Hybrid' may also refer to an identity forged from multicultural experiences. 'Hybridity' particularly belongs to life in a globalised cultural setting where various cultures meet and mix. Schreier writes that meaning is established in social judgment as speaker and hearer converse, and indeterminacy is a feature of dialogue as crossing cultural boundaries and reconfiguring the message so that it brings out unnoticed elements of a message more sharply (1999:68-73).⁴⁰ The other side of encountering and engaging the other is the need to understand the identity and location of self. 'I argue that Polanyi's tacit dimension provides language and categories for paying attention to previously hidden aspects of communication.

A missionary needs a sharpened awareness of her personal perspective and indwelling status. The gospel treasure is carried in jars of clay and the witness culture contributes influences to inhabited and perceived patterns of culture. Christian mission accepts a calling from the missionary God of Israel and God the Father of Jesus the Son to proclaim *metanoia* as the way for an individual to turn identity toward Christ. The apostle Paul's word to the Galatians bid those disciples to claim Christian identity as a source for unifying human particularity. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

The church and its mission thinkers need to continue the conversation about what constitutes authentic Christian identity in every location. Vanhoozer's Christological

⁴⁰ Schreier describes the dialogical tension as 'inculturation of the faith versus identification with the culture.' He suggests criteria for balancing inculturation and identification differ according to ecclesiastical tradition. He suggests three principles: (1) the gospel is about *metanoia* or change; (2) the culture cannot homogenize the gospel; and (3) inculturation is subject to the challenges and problems in intercultural communication (1999:68-75).

principle affirms that ‘God’s Spirit speaking in Scripture presents Jesus Christ as the center of Christian faith and life.’ His canonic principle declares that ‘the story of Jesus is the Church’s authoritative script’ (Vanhoozer 2006:109-13). George Sumner’s concept of final primacy proposes a rule for Christian discourse about other religious claims. Sumner argues that there is a pattern in the Christian narrative that finds in Jesus Christ the *prima veritas* (the first truth). Thus, he argues further that ‘final primacy’ reflects teaching about Jesus Christ as central to the Christian gospel; therefore, it is the pattern common to all appropriate theologies of religions (Sumner 2004:11-37).

9.6.2 *Imagination*

Writing about mission, culture, translation, the tacit dimension, language, linguistics, dialogue, identity, and related topics, has seemed like a journey through a world of reason and rationality. Alasdair MacIntyre’s question about ‘whose rationality’ echoes for me as I compare rational frameworks, paradigms, terms, and perspectives in the genre of religious discourse. Rational argument is the ethos of most academic publishing. I have presented an argument in my thesis about ‘translation’ as a useful way to describe the interpreter’s task of transmitting the Christian gospel to people who have not embraced it. I have enlisted elements of Michael Polanyi’s heuristic philosophy to delineate aspects of my conceptualisation of missional or convivial translation. Polanyi’s own journeys of discovery as a scientist and a philosopher, however, taught him to rely not only upon reason but also upon imagination. Polanyi observes,

The manner in which the mathematician works his way towards discovery, by shifting his confidence from intuition to computation and back again from computation to intuition, while never releasing his hold on either of the two, represents in miniature the whole range of operations by which articulation disciplines and expands the reasoning powers of man. (1958:131)

Intuition and faith as well as reason served him in his explorations to gain understanding and to articulate and publish his ideas. Polanyi wrote enthusiastically about the role creative imagination plays in the discovery process. In the article ‘The Creative Imagination,’ he summarises discovery:

We begin to see how the scientist’s vision is formed. Guided by our intuition, our imagination sallies forward and our intuition integrates then what the imagination has hit upon. But a fundamental complication comes into sight here. I have acknowledged that the final sanction of discovery lies in the sight of a coherence which our intuition detects and accepts as real; but history suggests that there are no universal standards for assessing such coherence. (Polanyi 1966b:90)

Earlier I noted Bosch’s observation regarding contextualisation and the need for the dimension of *poesis* (Bosch 1991:431). Stackhouse defines *poesis* as ‘the imaginative creation or representation of evocative images’ (Stackhouse 1988:85). Bosch agrees with Stackhouse’s concern that the contextualisation debate has been distorted or reduced to a matter of the relationship between *theory* and *praxis* at the expense of failing to consider the role of *poesis* (Bosch 1991:431). This nod to the imagination appreciates Polanyi’s dictum, ‘we know more than we can tell’.

The poetic image and the apt metaphor say more than can be expressed in numbers, formula, or arguments. Polanyi’s writings critique doubt, the separation of facts and beliefs, and the devaluing of faith declarations. He expresses a belief that intuition guides the imagination to sense hidden truth. George Steiner argues in *Real Presences* that the arts convey the presence of God in ways that transcend ordinary prose. He contends,

that the wager on the meaning of meaning, on the potential of insight and response when one human voice addresses another, when we come face to face with the text and work of art or music, which is to say when we encounter the other in its condition of freedom, is a wager on transcendence. (Steiner 1989:4)

Wallace Stevens’ 1937 poem ‘The Man with the Blue Guitar’ calls to mind the Picasso painting *The Old Guitarist*, featuring the same subject. It suggests to me the translator at work with a musical instrument.

The man bent over his guitar,
A shearsman of sorts. The day was green.
They said, 'You have a blue guitar,
You do not play things as they are.'
The man replied, 'Things as they are
Are changed upon the blue guitar.'
And they said to him, 'But play, you must,
A tune beyond us, yet ourselves,
A tune upon the blue guitar,
Of things exactly as they are. (Stevens 1967:133)

The enterprise of translation, both linguistic and conceptual, is properly more art than science. Translators must deal in images and metaphors as well as in practices, beliefs, and words. Drawing maps and using metaphors invite vision and creativity. Wise and experienced translators must guide the next generation of missionaries as mentors eager to pass on their craft. Translators are embodied communicators and must indwell cultures and locations. They must master their instruments and play the old songs in new ways. 'Does Christianity wipe out the old, take away the old, or invest the old with a new dynamic?' Kenneth Cragg anticipated the appreciation of 'conversion' by Walls, Sanneh, and Bediako as stimulating the vernacular and building on primal soil when he suggests: 'On the contrary; it [conversion] means harnessing its possibilities [the old] and setting up within it the revolution that will both fulfil and transform it. For if the old is taken away, to whom is the new given?' (Cragg 1968:57).

One must translate a universal gospel in terms that represent a double loyalty: allegiance to both the source/sender and a regard for the receptor/host. I invoke the image of the ambassador who is entrusted by an authority (monarch, nation, state, or embassy) with a message that must be translated and delivered. Ambassadors are not at liberty to change the message but do bear responsibility to convey the message in terms meaningful to a receptor. They must pay attention to sources and receptors as well as to their own surroundings and assumptions. Their work is best done in a convivial way alongside and accountable to others. The ambassador or 'convivial translator' will do well to embody a perspective reflecting both confidence and servanthood.

APPENDIX 1

Description of the Ruthwell Cross

The monument was damaged after the Church of Scotland passed an ‘Idolatrous Monuments Act’ in 1642 at its General Assembly meeting in Aberdeen. Enthusiastic iconoclasts pulled the Ruthwell Cross down and damaged portions of it. In 1802, Dr. Henry Duncan, the Ruthwell minister, rediscovered a buried upper section of the cross and reconstructed the monument in the garden of the manse. In 1887 the cross was moved inside the church and stands in a specially constructed apse.

Ruthwell seems an isolated venue for such a sophisticated presentation in stone, figures inscriptions, and poetry. The more developed centres of Christian monastic culture in Northumbria included Wearmouth and Jarrow, Lindisfarne, Whitby, Ripon, Hexham, and York. The closest known monastic community to Ruthwell was Whithorn, an Anglican *see* along with York, Hexham, and Lindisfarne. Whithorn or *Hwit Aern* in Old English also was known as *Candida Casa*; it was founded by Ninian. Its first bishop was Pecthelm whose tenure was brief (730-736) but of whom Bede comments positively (Bede 1990:23).⁴¹⁴

One theory that tries to identify origins of the Ruthwell setting points to the ancient kingdom of Rheged that included Celtic groups located on the north coast of the Solway. The runic script on the Ruthwell monument might then indicate a later Anglian takeover of the Solway region. The place names of Dumfriesshire indicate the lasting influence of a significant British population. A Briton likely would have been unable to read the runes, though he would have known the Latin inscriptions. Did this Anglian ‘cross monument’ signal the coming to power of newcomers? Did the theological programme on the monument suggest an ecclesiastical community that has since faded

⁴¹⁴ It is, of course, theoretically possible that a yet unidentified eighth century monastery remains, unknown to historians and unexcavated by archaeologists.

from view and record? Was Ruthwell on a path where travellers passed by or where pilgrims made visits? Was Whithorn close enough to be the source of the theologians and artists? Was the creator of the Ruthwell Cross a monk or monks from Lindisfarne wandering or visiting places as the community of Saint Cuthbert? History and archaeology have yet to yield these answers (Orton et al. 2007:121-130).⁴¹⁵

The stone shaft resembles an obelisk in its body with four sides or faces. The broad principal faces of the shaft are carved with figural subjects surrounded by identifying Latin inscriptions. The narrow sides of the shaft are decorative, carved with an ‘inhabited vine-scroll’. Swanton identifies this as a Middle Eastern motif deriving from models like the Ravenna throne. O Carragain avers this is a symbol for the tree of life. The vine-scroll at Ruthwell includes figures of birds and animals feeding upon stylized leaves, flowers, and bunches of grapes.⁴¹⁶ Circumscribing the two vine-scroll faces are inscriptions, or *tituli*, of runes that tell a portion of *The Dream of the Rood*. The *tituli* surround the vine-scrolls on the top and both sides; they do not run across the bottom.

The sculpted panels, from top to bottom, include the following scenes and Latin inscriptions:

1. Facing north

John the Baptist holding the paschal lamb of God; and partial inscription reads: ‘*We adore...*’

⁴¹⁵ Cramp, commenting on Ruthwell’s figural scene of Paul and Anthony declared, ‘one could see in the way in which their hair was cut high above the ears a depiction of the Celtic tonsure. If this were so, Ruthwell would surely be a monument to the reconciliation of the British and Irish churches with the Anglo-Saxon, and the reign of Aldfrith (685-705) would provide a context.’ (1999:13)

⁴¹⁶ Cramp 1999:9; ‘Christianity brought hope to the Anglo-Saxons: of a protector Creator who harmonized the natural world so that birds and beasts no longer struggled, against themselves and humanity, but happily found themselves and their place on the true vine (the image of the inhabited vine scroll is more fully developed in Northumbria than elsewhere in w. Europe-even in Ireland)’; see Ó Carragáin (2005).

Christ in Judgement standing upon fawning beasts; and inscription reads: '*Jesus Christ, Judge of Righteousness. Beasts and dragons recognised in the desert the Savoir of the World.*'

Paul and Anthony, considered with John to be founders of monasticism; and inscription reads: '*Saints Paul and Anthony, the hermits, broke bread in the desert.*'

Flight into Egypt; and inscription reads: '*Mary and Jo[seph]...*' lettering and figures are severely defaced.

The large bottom panel is mostly obliterated. Swanton and others speculate that this panel originally represented a nativity scene similar to that of the Ravenna throne or the Rabulu Gospel.⁴¹⁷

2. Facing south:

Visitation panel features two women; and runic inscription reads: '*ladies... Martha? Mary.*' Elizabeth is the one expected to be mentioned; that Martha is mentioned is a curious error or is an unsolved puzzle.

Christ forgiving Mary Magdalene; and the inscription reads: '*She brought an alabaster box of ointment and standing behind his feet she began to wash his feet with her tears and dried them with the hairs of her head*' (Luke 7:37-38).

Christ healing the man born blind; and the inscription reads: '*And passing he saw a man blind from birth, and he cured him of his infirmity*' (John 9:1).

Annunciation scene, a winged angel confronting a female figure; and inscription reads: '*And the angel having entered, said to her "Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee, blessed art thou among women."*'

⁴¹⁷ Swanton explains (1987:16): A Nativity Scene would provide a natural link between annunciation and flight scenes and correspond to the crucifixion scene on the opposite face.

Crucifixion scene with an upright Christ bearded and dressed in a loincloth is on the large bottom panel. Symbols for sun and moon seen above and some evidence for two figures placed below and by the cross. No inscription remains. (Swanton 1987:18-19)

Only portions of the original crosshead remain. Apparently, the original monument featured figures of the four Evangelists and their medieval animal attributes. Only Saint John with his eagle can be seen in part. Saint Matthew and his angel are greatly blurred. Saints Mark and Luke are missing because of a missing transom. An interesting ornament remains on the southern face of the cross: a bird and a crouched archer. Swanton claims that the archer is a frequent motif on Northumbrian sculpture. Is the archer aiming to shoot the arrow of the gospel into a soul or is this an arrow of sin? (Swanton 1987:20).

APPENDIX 2

The Dream of the Rood (Vercelli Text)

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Listen! I will describe the best of dreams
which I dreamed in the middle of the night
when, far and wide, all men slept.
it seemed that I saw a wondrous tree
soaring into the air, surrounded by light,
the brightest of crosses; that emblem was entirely
cased in gold; beautiful jewels
were strewn around its foot, just as five
studded the cross-beam. All the angels of God,
fair creations, guarded it. That was no cross
of a criminal, but holy spirits and men on earth
watched over it there – the whole glorious universe.

Wondrous was the tree of victory, and I was strained
by sin, stricken by guilt. I saw this glorious tree
joyfully gleaming, adorned with garments,
decked in gold; the tree of the Ruler
was rightly adorned with rich stones;
yet through that gold I could see the agony
once suffered by wretches, for it had bled
down the right hand side. Then I was afflicted,
frightened at this sight; I saw that sign often change
its clothing and hue, at times dewy with moisture,
stained by flowing blood, at times adorned with treasure.
Yet I lay there for a long while
and gazed sadly at the Saviour's cross
until I heard it utter words;
the finest of trees began to speak:
'I remember the morning a long time ago
that I was felled at the edge of the forest
and severed from my roots. Strong enemies seized me,
bade me hold up their felons on high,
made me a spectacle. Men shifted me
on their shoulders and set me on a hill.
Many enemies fastened me there. I saw the Lord of Mankind
hasten with such courage to climb upon me.
I dared not bow or break there
against my Lord's wish, when I saw the surface
of the earth tremble. I could have felled
all my foes, yet I stood firm.
Then the young warrior, God Almighty,

stripped Himself, firm and unflinching. He climbed
upon the cross, brave before many, to redeem mankind.
I quivered when the hero clasped me,
yet I dared not bow to the ground,
fall to the earth. I had to stand firm.
A rood was I raised up; I bore aloft the mighty King,
the Lord of Heaven. I dared not stoop.
They drove dark nails into me; dire wounds are there to see,
the gaping gashes of malice; I dared not injure them.
They insulted us both together; I was drenched in the blood
that streamed from the Man's side after He set His spirit free.

On that hill I endured many grievous trials;
I saw the God of Hosts stretched
on the rack; darkness covered the corpse
of the Ruler with clouds, His shining radiance.
Shadows swept across the land, dark shapes
under the clouds. All creation wept,
wailed for the death of the King; Christ was on the cross.
Yet men hurried eagerly to the Prince
from afar; I witnessed all that too.
I was oppressed with sorrow, yet humbly bowed to the hands of men,
and willingly. There they lifted Him from His heavy torment,
they took Almighty God away. The warriors left me standing there,
stained with blood; sorely was I wounded by the sharpness of spear-shafts.
They laid Him down, limb-weary; they stood at the corpse's head,
they beheld there the Lord of Heaven; and there He rested for a while,
worn-out after battle. And then they began to build a sepulcher;
under his slayers' eyes, they carved it from the gleaming stone,
and laid therein the Lord of Victories. Then, sorrowful at dusk,
they sang a dirge before they went, weary,
from their glorious Prince; He rested in the grave alone.
But we still stood there, weeping blood,
long after the song of the warriors
had soared to heaven; the corpse grew cold,
the fair human house of the soul. Then our enemies
began to fell us; that was a terrible fate.
They buried us in a deep pit; but friends
and followers of the Lord found me there
and girded me with gold and shimmering silver.

Now, my loved man, you have heard
how I endured bitter anguish
at the hands of evil men. Now the time is come
when men far and wide in this world,
and all this bright creation, bow before me;
they pray to this sign. On me the Son of God
suffered for a time; wherefore I now stand on high,
glorious under heaven; and I can heal
all those who stand in awe of me.

Long ago I became the worst of tortures,
hated by men, until I opened
to them the true way of life.
Lo! The Lord of Heaven, the Prince of Glory,
honoured me over any other tree
just as He, Almighty God, for the sake of mankind
honoured Mary, His own mother,
before all other women in the world.
Now I command you, my loved man,
to describe your vision to all men;
tell them with words this is the tree of glory
on which the Son of God suffered once
for the many sins committed by mankind,
and for Adam's wickedness long ago.
He sipped the drink of death. Yet the Lord rose
with His great strength to deliver man.
Then He ascended into heaven. The Lord Himself,
Almighty God with His host of angels,
will come to the middle-world again
on Domesday to reckon with each man.
Then He who has the power of judgement
will judge each man just as he deserves
for the way in which he lived this fleeting life.
No-one then will be unafraid
as to what words the Lord will utter.
Before the assembly, He will ask where that man is
who, in God's name, would undergo the pangs of death,
just as He did formerly upon the cross.
Then men will be fearful and give
scant thought to what they say to Christ.
But no-one need be numbed by fear
who has carried the best of all signs in his breast;
each soul that has longings to live with the Lord
must search for a kingdom far beyond the frontiers of this world.'

Then I prayed to the cross, eager
and light-hearted, although I was alone
with my own poor company. My soul
longed for a journey, great yearnings
always tugged at me. Now my hope in this life
is that I can turn to that tree of victory
alone and more often than any other man
and honour it fully. These longings master
my heart and mind, and my help comes
from holy cross itself. I have not many friends
of influence on earth; they have journeyed on
from the hoys of this world to find the King of Glory,
they live in heaven with the High Father,
dwell in splendour. Now I look day by day
for that time when the cross of the Lord,

which once I saw in a dream here on earth,
will fetch me away from this fleeting life
and lift me to the home of joy and happiness
where the people of God are seated at the feast
in eternal bliss, and set me down
where I may live in glory unending and share
the joy of the saints. May the Lord be a friend to me,
He who suffered once for the sins of men
here on earth on the gallows-tree.
He has redeemed us; He has given life to us,
and a home in heaven.

Hope was renewed,
blessed and blissful, for those who before suffered burning.
On that journey the Son was victorious,
strong and successful. When He, Almighty Ruler,
returned with a thronging host of spirits
to God's kingdom, to joy amongst the angels
and all the saints who lived already
in heaven in glory, then their King,
Almighty God, entered His own country.

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