INTRODUCTION TO PART *II*

The published evaluations of Bible translations that I have read address a limited number of issues such as text-critical matters, word choice, theological positions, or underlying translating philosophy. One of the very best of these was written by Barclay Newman, a translating consultant for the United Bible Societies. His article appeared in the journal *The Bible Translator* in July of 1980 in an article entitled *Readability and the NIV Version of the NT*. It may be one of the most detailed and well-documented evaluations of a scripture translation ever written. Here is an example of his pointed remarks:

> **Biblicisms, archaisms, translationese.** Translationese is a hidden enemy that the translator must constantly be on guard against. The NIV abounds with echoes of biblicisms that have become "in-group jargon" for Christians on Sunday morning. A few examples from Matthew: *be with child, what is conceived in her, Magi, brood of vipers, produce fruit, to fulfill all righteousness, poor in spirit, hallowed be your name, birds of the air, peace rest on it, those born of women, the Law prophesied, blessed are your eyes, sons of the kingdom, if anyone would come after me, the spirit is willing, betrayed innocent blood, gave up his spirit.*

Barclay cites eighteen (!) other categories of deficient translating in the NIV and enforces his criticisms with hundreds of examples. (See pages 91-92.) In spite of this impressive amount of evidence, Barclay only focuses on a few slices of language codes and coding procedures in the text—mainly words, phrases, and sentence structures considered from the perspective of their readability.

Comprehensive evaluations of scripture translations that include the entire spectrum of language codes and coding procedures are unknown to me. One would expect that the producers of scripture translations would initiate and publish such evaluations of their own translations. The fact that they don't is indicative of the unwillingness on the part of translators and publishers to place scripture translations under the scrutiny of rigorous tests. An analysis such as Barclay's should long ago have served as an alarm signal. If he discovered a great bulk of translation deficiencies by analyzing only a small slice of the language codes in a mainline translation, should this not raise the suspicion that even greater problems would be found with the other language codes? And why wouldn't it raise questions about the situation with other translations?

The evaluation I carried out for the writing of this book focused on ten translations of the New Testament: The *New International Version,* the *Net Bible, The King James Version*, *The New King James Version, The New Living Translation*, *Today's English Version*, *Phillips Modern English*, the *Revised Standard Version*, the *Jerusalem Bible*, and the *New American Standard*

Bible. For the sake of keeping the illustrative material from overburdening the text, selections of data from five of these translations were chosen for inclusion in this report.

The emphasis of this evaluation is on New Testament translations. A limited number of observations are made concerning the Old Testament scriptures but only as they relate to the New Testament translations.

The evaluation made extensive use of the language codes and coding procedures explained in the previous chapters. The basic approach was to take samples of the codes and coding procedures in the translations and compare them with those in the Koine Greek texts that are the sources of the scriptures. The differences were then recorded. The main discrepancies are documented in the three chapters of *Part II* and in *Appendix A*.

As we proceed, there will be times when it is helpful to review information about the relevant codes and coding procedures of language as recorded in *Part I*. As a help in this regard, the page numbers of sections for review are included at key places in the text.

The crucial role of situation codes in translating

The situation codes play a particularly important role when translating not only from one language to another, but from one period of time to another, from one culture to another, and from one historical context to another. The situation codes of the source documents require that *all* of the language codes of the translated text completely reflect the meanings of the codes as intended by the writers of the source documents. (See pages 8-9.) Though all translators should be aware of this absolute rule of translating, it continues to be one of the most common flaws in Bible translations.

In terms of the writings of scripture, this means that all the language codes in a translation of the scripture must be firmly rooted in the first century. They should reflect the meanings of the Koine Greek language of that time; they should correspond to the cultural environment of the authors and the first readers; they should fit into the historical context of that time.

In other words, the documents must be allowed to mean what they meant at the time they were written. A translator must be careful not to allow concepts or understandings from later centuries to be read back into the documents. This danger is particularly high when a translator not only has to bridge two languages but also two cultures separated by two thousand years.

Mixing up situation codes happens easily. Observe the following passage from *The Octopus*, a novel written by the American, Frank Norris, in 1901:

> *Lyman Derrick sat dictating letters to his typewriter . . .*
> *"That's all for the present," he said at length.*
> *Without reply, the typewriter rose and withdrew.*

Norris was not writing a science fiction novel with robot typewriters. In 1901 a typewriter was the person who worked on a typewriting machine, not the machine itself. A reprint of this book would require substituting the word *secretary* for *typewriter* to make sure the text says to a modern reader what it meant when it was written.

Is this example farfetched? Not at all. The scripture translations in this evaluation use many terms that the translators should have avoided precisely because they cause readers to transport present-day understandings of these terms back into the text.

When in the translations, for example, Paul addresses one of his letters to the *church* of the Thessalonians, just how does a twenty-first century reader understand that word *church*? Does he see Paul's letter being read on Sunday morning from a pulpit in a sanctuary? The common association today of the term *church* with Sunday meetings, pulpits, choirs, worship services, liturgies, buildings with bell towers, sanctuaries, altars, and denominational names would all be completely foreign to Paul and his understanding of the Greek word *ekklesia*, the word that *church* is supposed to translate.

Ekklesia was a common word from the political life of the Greeks. It was also known by Jews from its usage in the Greek translation of the Jewish scriptures. It called up associations and networks of language code for both the Greeks and the Jews that were considerably different than those people associate with the word *church* today. There is no linguistic justification for using the word *church* in a modern translation. Any linguistic test of what modern readers understand with the word demonstrates that the term calls up meanings foreign to the word *ekklesia* as it was understood in the first century.[1]

So why does *church* continue to be the word used in Bible translations for *ekklesia*? This book analyzes the reasons for this and many other questionable practices in Bible translations, and it proposes ten measures that need to be taken to assure that translations of the scriptures be as accurate as possible.

For now, it's important to note that situation codes should never be ignored. It is unacceptable for a translator to use words in a translation with meanings that they could never have had when the original document was written.

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[1]Is it true that the word church really is a deficient translation for *ekklesia*? This can be verified by a basic linguistic analysis in which a broad selection of readers is tested. This in fact has been done with the word *church* by one of the most prestigious linguistic organizations in the English speaking world: The editors of the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary and the editors of the G. And C. Merriam Company. Their determination of what people understood by the word *church* is as follows:

> 1: a building for public and esp. Christian worship 2: the clergy or officialdom of a religious body 3: a body or organization of religious believers as a: the whole body of Christians b: denomination c: congregation 4: a public divine worship (goes to *church* every Sunday) 5: the clerical profession (considered the *church* as a possible career)

Only one of these understandings *(3:a:)* comes close to the usage of $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\epsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ in the scriptures, but what reader would exclusively understand only that? Nor is the actual meaning of $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\epsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$ included anywhere in these results. This linguistic analysis clearly disqualifies *church* as a translation for $\epsilon\kappa\kappa\lambda\epsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$. It misleads readers to transport present-day meanings into the word.

In the chapters that follow, we will focus on three critical coding procedures used in the Bible translations: genre coding, prominence coding, and reference coding. We will be examining them particularly to see if they correspond to the situation coding of the original documents.

In all cases, we will compare the language codes in the translations with those in the Koine Greek texts which are the source documents of the scriptures. An understanding of Koine Greek is certainly advantageous to anyone reading these evaluations, but as an aid, all Greek texts have been provided with enough English accompaniment to assure that an attentive reader can continue to follow the text.