THE THEORY AND
PRACTICE
OF TRANSLATION

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BY

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AND

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THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TRANSLATION

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PREFACE

This volume on *The Theory and Practice of Translation* is the logical outgrowth of the previous book *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), which explored some of the basic factors constituting a scientific approach to translation. This second volume presents certain of these same theories in a pedagogically oriented order, designed to assist the translator to master the theoretical elements as well as to gain certain practical skills in learning how to carry out the procedures. (Though this present book treats the problems of translating primarily in terms of a scientific orientation to linguistic structures, semantic analysis, and information theory, it does not lose sight of the fact that translating is far more than a science. It is also a skill, and in the ultimate analysis fully satisfactory translation is always an art.)

In this volume the illustrative data are drawn primarily from the field of Bible translating.)This reflects both the immediate concerns of those for whom the book has been specifically prepared and the background experience of the authors. There are, however, certain ways in which this may be a distinct advantage to the reader interested in the broadest possible aspects of translating, (for Bible translating has a longer tradition (it began in the third century B.C.), involves far more languages (1393 languages by the end of 1968), is concerned with a greater variety of cultures (Bible translators have worked in all areas of the world), and includes a wider range of literary types (from lyric poetry to theological discourse) than any comparable kind of translating.)Accordingly, even though the illustrative data may seem somewhat restricted, the total range of background experience is unusually wide, and hence the basis for observations on the essential problems of semantic analysis, discourse structures, and cultural transfers is particularly valid.

(The first two chapters are essentially introductory, for they deal with certain of the broader issues and attempt to orient the reader with respect to the total task. The following chapters take up in a systematic order the fundamental procedures of translating: analysis, transfer, restructuring, and testing. Purely practical considerations of committee organization and procedures for carrying out the work of translating are treated in the Appendix. A glossary of technical terms is also added, as a kind of index, in which difficult words are briefly defined. The reader is then referred to that particular place in the text where the subject is discussed in greatest detail and thoroughness.)

This volume is the result of three different drafts, prepared over a period of approximately four years, and used in varying form in a number of translators' institutes and seminars held in various places throughout the world. It has also benefited from the advice and counsel of a number

of Translations Consultants working under the auspices of the United Bible Societies.

The Theory and Practice of Translation is not, however, to be considered exhaustive in the sense that it explores fully all the important areas and problems of the translator. In two respects especially there is need for further amplification: 1. the presentation of structural semantics, including componential analysis, and 2. discourse analysis. As regards the first kind of problems, another volume is now in preparation, tentatively titled *Introduction to Structural Semantics*, which will deal much more fully with the theoretical and structural aspects of semantics. The whole matter of grammatical meaning will be treated there, including especially the important notions of "case" and "role" as discussed in recent writings of Fillmore and Langendoen. (In the second area, research is also being carried out by the technical staff of the Bible Societies, which will lead to publications in the not-too-distant future.)

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CHAPTER ONE

A NEW CONCEPT OF TRANSLATING

Never before in the history of the world have there been so many persons engaged in the translating of both secular and religious materials. It is estimated that at least 100,000 persons dedicate most or all of their time to such work, and of these at least 3,000 are engaged primarily in the translation of the Bible into some 800 languages, representing about 80 percent of the world's population.

Unfortunately, the underlying theory of translating has not caught up with the development of skills; and in religious translating, despite consecrated talent and painstaking efforts, a comprehension of the basic principles of translation and communication has lagged behind translating in the secular fields. One specialist in translating and interpreting for the aviation industry commented that in his work he did not dare to employ the principles often followed by translators of the Bible: "With us," he said, "complete intelligibility is a matter of life and death." Unfortunately, translators of religious materials have sometimes not been prompted by the same feeling of urgency to make sense.

The Old Focus and the New Focus

(The older focus in translating was the form of the message, and translators took particular delight in being able to reproduce stylistic specialties, e.g., rhythms, rhymes, plays on words, chiasmus, parallelism, and unusual grammatical structures. The new focus, however, has shifted from the form of the message to the response of the receptor. Therefore, what one must determine is the response of the receptor to the translated message. This response must then be compared with the way in which the original receptors presumably reacted to the message when it was given in its original setting.)

(Even the old question: Is this a correct translation? must be answered in terms of another question, namely: For whom? Correctness must be determined by the extent to which the average reader for which a translation is intended will be likely to understand it correctly.) Moreover, we are not concerned merely with the possibility of his understanding correctly, but with the overwhelming likelihood of it. In other words, we are not content merely to translate so that the average receptor is likely to understand the message; rather we aim to make certain that such a person is very unlikely to misunderstand it.

(Posing the question of correctness in this manner naturally implies that there will be different translations which can be called "correct." In fact, for the scholar who is himself well acquainted with the original, even the most labored, literal translation will be "correct," for he will not misunderstand it. On the other hand, in most large linguistic com-

munities, especially when they employ so-called international languages spoken by millions of people, there are a number of socioeducational levels of speech and comprehension. This means that several different levels of translation, in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures, are required, if all people are to have essentially equal opportunities to understand the message.)

(This test of comprehensibility is concerned primarily with discovering and eliminating two different types of expressions: (1) those which are likely to be misunderstood and (2) those so difficult and "heavy" (whether in vocabulary or grammar) as to discourage the reader from attempting to comprehend the content of the message. Such idioms as "children of the bridechamber" (Mark 2:19) and "heap coals of fire on his head" (Rom. 12:20) are typical of the first category. The average person unacquainted with Semitic idioms is simply not going to understand that the "children of the bridechamber" are the friends of the bridegroom, or wedding guests, and that "heap coals of fire on his head" means to make a person ashamed of his behavior, and is not a way of torturing people to death.)

When a high percentage of people misunderstand a rendering, it cannot be regarded as a legitimate translation. For example, in Romans 1:17 most traditional translations have "the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith," and most readers naturally assume that this is a reference to God's own personal righteousness. Most scholars are agreed, however, that this is not God's own righteousness, but the process by which God puts men right with himself (cf. Today's English Version). It is the act of "justification" (to use a technical, and generally misunderstood word) and not the character of righteousness. But a translation which insists on rendering the Greek literally as "the righteousness of God" is simply violating the meaning for the sake of preserving a formal grammatical correspondence.

In addition to being quite misleading, a translation may also be so stylistically heavy as to make comprehension almost impossible. For example, in the American Standard Version (1901), 2 Corinthians 3:10 reads, "For verily that which hath been made glorious hath not been made glorious in this respect, by reason of the glory that surpasseth." The words are all English, but the sentence structure is essentially Greek. The New English Bible quite rightly restructures this passage to read, "Indeed, the splendour that once was is now no splendour at all; it is outshone by a splendour greater still."

Problem 1

Evaluate the following sets of renderings of Biblical passages in terms of how readily and correctly an ordinary reader or hearer is likely to understand them:

 1. Matt. 3:15c: "Then he [John] suffered him [Jesus]" (KJV).

                    "So John agreed" (TEV).

2. John 1:14: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (KJV).

"So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendour (the splendour as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth" (Phillips).

"The Word became a human being and lived among us. We saw his glory, full of grace and truth. This was the glory which he received as the Father's only Son" (TEV).

3. Rom. 3:21-22: "But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe" (KJV).

"But, in these days, God's way of justification has at last been brought to light; one which was attested by the law and the prophets, but stands apart from the law; God's way of justification through faith in Jesus Christ, meant for everybody and sent down upon everybody without distinction, if he has faith" (Knox).

"But now God's way of putting men right with himself has been revealed, and it has nothing to do with law. The Law and the prophets gave their witness to it: God puts men right through their faith in Jesus Christ. God does this to all who believe in Christ" (TEV).

NEW ATTITUDES WITH RESPECT TO RECEPTOR LANGUAGES

Some of the basic difficulties in Bible translation can be traced to the fact that people often have quite wrong views of the receptor as well as of the source languages. Hence, to produce texts which will approximate the goal of equivalent response, translators often need to change their view of the languages in which they are working. This includes not merely a shift in some of the attitudes which tend to place the source languages on a theological pedestal and to bow down before them in blind submission, but it often requires quite a radical rethinking of one's attitude toward the receptor language, even when it is one's own mother tongue.

Each language has its own genius.

In the first place, it is essential to recognize that each language has its own genius. That is to say, each language possesses certain distinctive

characteristics which give it a special character, *e.g.*, word-building capacities, unique patterns of phrase order, techniques for linking clauses into sentences, markers of discourse, and special discourse types of poetry, proverbs, and song. Each language is rich in vocabulary for the areas of cultural focus, the specialities of the people, *e.g.*, cattle (Anuaks in the Sudan), yams (Ponapeans in Micronesia), hunting and fishing (Piros in Peru), or technology (the western world). Some languages are rich in modal particles. Others seem particularly adept in the development of figurative language, and many have very rich literary resources, both written and oral.

To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language.

Rather than bemoan the lack of some feature in a language, one must respect the features of the receptor language and exploit the potentialities of the language to the greatest possible extent. Unfortunately, in some instances translators have actually tried to "remake" a language. For example, one missionary in Latin America insisted on trying to introduce the passive voice of the verb into a language which had no such form. Of course, this was not successful. One must simply accept the fact that there are many languages which do not have a passive voice. They merely choose to report actions only as active.

Rather than force the formal structure of one language upon another, the effective translator is quite prepared to make any and all formal changes necessary to reproduce the message in the distinctive structural forms of the receptor language.

Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message.

For the average person the potential and actual equivalence of languages is perhaps the most debated point about translation. He does not see how people who have no snow can understand a passage in the Bible that speaks about "white as snow." If the people do not know snow, how can they have a word for it? And if they do not have a word for it, then how can the Bible be translated? The answer to this question is both complex and varied. In the first place, many people have a word for snow, even if they have not themselves experienced it, for they have heard about the phenomenon. Second, in other instances, people do not know snow, but they do have "frost" and they speak about the two with the same term. Third, many languages have equivalent idioms, *e.g.*, "white as egret feathers," or "white as fungus" (if there is an especially white form of fungus); or they may use a nonmetaphor to express the concept "white as snow," such as "very, very white." The point is that snow as an object is not crucial to the message.

Some persons may object, however, and insist that unless one has a word for snow, the translation is not adequate, for anything which does not communicate the precise meaning of the original is a distortion. Of course no communication, even within a single language, is ever absolute (for no two people ever understand words in exactly the same manner),

and we certainly cannot expect a perfect match between languages. In fact, we do not have such a match even in translating from Hebrew or Greek into English, with all its wealth of vocabulary (more than a million words if one includes all the technical terminology). When the Hebrew word *ḥeṣed* is translated into English as "loving-kindness," or as "covenant love," there is much left unsaid, for this Hebrew term implies a whole social structure of mutual loyalty and support between the tribal chief and his followers, a relationship quite strange to us and almost unthinkable to many people. Similarly, when the Gospel of John uses the Greek word *logos*, "Word," in the prologue, there simply is no English word (and certainly not *Word* itself) which can do justice to the variety and richness of meaning of this Greek term.

It must be said, however, that if the form in which a message is expressed is an essential element of its significance, there is a very distinct limitation in communicating this significance from one language to another. It is usually impossible to reproduce this type of "meaning." For example, in the third chapter of John, Jesus speaks of the "wind" and of the "Spirit." In Greek a single word, *pneuma*, is used with both meanings. This results in a very significant play on words, but it cannot be reproduced in English. The best we can do under such circumstances is to use a marginal note to call the attention of the reader to the fact that in the source language one and the same word has both meanings.

In a similar way, we cannot reproduce the rhythm of Hebrew poetry, the acrostic features of many poems, and the frequent intentional alliteration. At this point, languages just do not correspond, and so we must be prepared to sacrifice certain formal niceties for the sake of the content.

To preserve the content of the message the form must be changed.

If all languages differ in form (and this is the essence of their being different languages), then quite naturally the forms must be altered if one is to preserve the content. For example, in Mark 1:4, the Greek employs a nominal construction, "baptism of repentance," but translated literally into English the resulting phrase really does not convey the meaning of the original. The average person is simply unable to describe clearly what is the relationship between "baptism" and "repentance." Moreover, in a high percentage of languages, terms which express events (and both "baptism" and "repentance" are events, not objects) are expressed more naturally as verbs, rather than as nouns. Even this Greek noun expression is really only a nominalization (or adaptation) of what occurs in Acts 2:38 in verbal form, namely, "repent and be baptized." In languages which either require that such events be expressed as verbs or normally use verb rather than noun phrases, it is not only right, but essential, that the nominal form of this Greek phrase be changed into a corresponding verbal expression.

The extent to which the forms must be changed in order to preserve the meaning will depend upon the linguistic and cultural distance between languages. Quite naturally the easiest transitions (those with the least

amount of formal change), occur when one translates from a language such as English into German, or Fante into Ashanti, closely related languages. Moreover, English and German represent the same general cultural setting, Western technological, and Fante and Ashanti represent the same cultural setting, West African. On the other hand, if one is translating from English into Hungarian, or from Hausa to Fulani, the formal shifts are greater, for Hungarian is not a member of the Germanic branch of the Indo-European family of languages, but belongs to an entirely different family, the Finno-Ugrian, and Hausa and Fulani belong to different language families. However, Hungarian is still part of the same cultural setting as English, and Hausa and Fulani belong to the same basic cultural setting. Hence, the shifts are not so extreme.

If, however, one has to translate from English into Hindi, the formal changes are greater than from English to Hungarian, for even though English and Hindi belong to the same Indo-European family of languages, the cultural contexts, including many differences of world view, are so diverse that the formal structure patterns, both grammatical and lexical, must be altered more extensively in order to preserve the content. Finally, in translating from a language such as English into Zulu, which belongs to the so-called Bantu family of languages and represents quite a different culture, the formal modifications must be still more extreme.

Problem 2

After investigating the real meaning of the following expressions, recast them in a different form which better conveys the meaning:

1. "if she pass the flower of her age" (1 Cor. 7:36b).
2. "Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:8).
3. "which devour widows' houses" (Luke 20:47).
4. "our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us" (Acts 7:38b).

New Attitudes Concerning the Source Language

A new attitude concerning the receptor languages inevitably implies a new view of the source languages—Greek and Hebrew—and for some people, a new attitude toward secondary source languages, such as English, French, and Spanish, which are often used as substitute bases for translation.

Unfortunately some people have an exaggerated view of the Biblical languages. Hebrew is regarded as a special esoteric tongue for the theologians, and Greek is a "mystery," or "the finest instrument of human thought ever devised by man." On the contrary, Greek and Hebrew are just "languages," with all the excellencies and liabilities that every language tends to have. They are neither the languages of heaven nor the speech of the Holy Spirit. To recognize their true worth and significance it is important to understand three essential, theologically relevant implications about Greek and Hebrew and their use as vehicles of Biblical communication:

The languages of the Bible are subject to the same limitations as any other natural language.

Greek and Hebrew are simply languages, like any other languages, and they are to be understood and analyzed in the same manner as any other ancient tongues. They both possess extraordinarily effective means of communication, even as all languages do; and they also have their liabilities, even as all languages do. For example, in the Greek Gospels there are some 700 grammatical and lexical ambiguities, but of course, as in most languages, a high percentage of these are resolved by the linguistic context. But what is really important is that these languages, as used in the Bible, employ words which have meaning only in terms of the cultural contexts in which the languages were used. That is to say, for the message of the Bible the writers did not invent wholesale a number of unknown terms. Rather, they used words current at that time. They did, however, often use words in very special ways—just as one may do in any language when he wants to communicate some new insight—but the words of the Bible were all current terms. Our problem today is that many of the cultural contexts of Bible times which provided meanings for those words no longer exist and therefore we often cannot determine just what a word means. Nevertheless, all the vocabulary was itself rooted in the finite experience of men and women, and all of the expressions must be understood in terms of this type of background. Otherwise one becomes hopelessly enmeshed in arguments about the absolute character of symbols; and valid exegesis, that is, reconstructing the communication event with all its implications, becomes no longer possible.

The writers of the Biblical books expected to be understood.

Writing to be understood might seem to be a truism, but for some persons it is a startling revelation, for many individuals have assumed that the Bible is not a book to be understood. One person, for example, who began to read Today's English Version remarked, "This must not be the Bible; I can understand it."

The Bible is not a collection of cabalistic writings or of Delphic oracles. The writers of the Bible were addressing themselves to concrete historical situations and were speaking to living people confronted with pressing issues. It is not always possible for us to understand precisely what the writers meant, but we do injustice to them to assume that they were intentionally trying to be obscure.

If we assume that the writers of the Bible expected to be understood, we should also assume that they intended one meaning and not several, unless an intentional ambiguity is linguistically "marked." Of course, there are a number of such purposefully ambiguous expressions (which are clearly indicated by context), and it is important that the translator either reproduce the ambiguity in the same evident way or explain it in a marginal note. But one does not do justice to the intention of the writer if he tries to "ride the fence" in the case of those expressions which can have two or more meanings among which he cannot easily decide

simply because he cannot reconstruct the cultural setting in which the writing first took place. In these instances it is better for the translator to select the meaning which seems best supported by all the evidence and to put this in the text, while placing the other in a marginal note. Otherwise he will give the impression to the reader that the original writer was constantly dodging the issue and was unwilling to make sense.

The translator must attempt to reproduce the meaning of a passage as understood by the writer.

The principle of attempting to reproduce the meaning of a passage as understood by the writer may seem so obvious as not to be worth saying, but there is much more here than one might suspect. For example, some persons insist that in translating the Greek of the New Testament one must go back to the Aramaic and understand Jesus' words in terms of what he must have said in Aramaic. But the translator is bound to ask himself: What was it that Luke, writing in his day, understood by the Greek that he used? If we are to make a faithful translation of Luke's Gospel, this is what must be our viewpoint. Otherwise, we will not only be involved in interminable controversy, but we will inevitably tend toward unwarranted harmonization. For example, in the Lucan form of the Beatitudes it is the "poor" who are blessed, but in Matthew they are the "poor in spirit" (or "those who recognize their spiritual poverty"). Luke employs an expression which is a direct reference to poor people, but Matthew puts it into a more "spiritual context." To try to reconstruct the Aramaic, and to reinterpret both Luke and Matthew on the basis of this reconstruction, is not the translator's task.

Similarly, many of the Psalms have important Ugaritic parallels, and much can be understood in the Psalms as the result of such studies, but one does not translate these Psalms as though they were Ugaritic ritual songs, but as hymns used in the temple worship of Yahweh.

Not only must we avoid going behind the writer; we must also avoid going ahead of the writer in exegeting and understanding his language. For example, the Greek term *pistis*, "faith," came to have the meaning "content of faith," or "creed," in the later parts of the New Testament and especially in the writings of the early Christian Fathers. But it would be quite wrong to read this meaning back into the Gospels, *e.g.*, in Luke 18:8. Similarly, we must not read back into the Genesis account of creation our own "world view" and translate the days as "geological ages," or the "dome of the sky" (wrongly translated in English as "firmament") as "the ionosphere."

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS OF A NEW CONCEPT OF TRANSLATING

The practical implications of a new concept of translating may be readily seen in the comparison of Romans 1:5 in the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, and Today's English Version:

  RSV: "through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring

about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations,"

NEB: "Through him I received the privilege of a commission in his name to lead to faith and obedience men in all nations,"

TEV: "Through him God gave me the privilege of being an apostle, for the sake of Christ, in order to lead people of all nations to believe and obey."

The RSV represents a close formal correspondence to the original Greek text, reflecting as it does the order of the Greek words and phrases and also the corresponding word classes; that is to say, nouns are translated as nouns and verbs as verbs. For the average reader there are, however, some problems in understanding the RSV text:

1. "We" is quite ambiguous: Is Paul actually speaking about himself, in which case "I" would be clearer, or does he imply that other apostles are included?
2. Though "we" is the grammatical subject of "received grace," it is nevertheless the semantic "goal" of the process, and accordingly it is clearer in many languages to make it also the grammatical goal, as in the TEV.
3. In the RSV, "grace and apostleship" would seem to be two coordinate activities, while in reality the semantic goal of "grace" is the ministry of being an apostle, but the English coordinate phrase obscures this fact.
4. "The obedience of faith" is quite misleading in English, for we do not have in English this type of construction involving two nouns of action (we will be calling them by the more general term "event nouns"), in which the one which is chronologically second precedes the first (compare "baptism of repentance," a transform of "repent and be baptized").
5. The attachment of "among all the nations" to the phrase "obedience of faith" is unclear, for "all the nations" (or better, "all nations") is actually the semantic subject of both the obedience and the faith.
6. The position of the phrase "for the sake of his name" is misleading. Semantically it is related to the activity of being an apostle and therefore should be placed closer to the words with which it is meaningfully connected, if the reader is to understand fully what is intended.

Both the NEB and the TEV attempt to restructure this passage in order to preserve the meaning of the original. Both translations, for example, change "we" to "I" or "me." Both have related "grace" to "apostleship." Similarly, "for his name's sake" is shifted in position, and "obedience of faith" is correctly restructured in the right order, either as a noun expression, "faith and obedience" (NEB), or as a verb expression, "believe and obey" (TEV).

The TEV has gone somewhat further than the NEB in certain respects:

1. God is introduced as the subject of "grace," for this makes clear the fact that "through him" identifies the secondary agent.
2. "Me" is made the grammatical as well as the semantic goal.
3. The rather high-level word "apostleship" is restructured into the phrase "being an apostle." (One of the difficulties with "commission," as in NEB, is that it can be misleading, for to many people it seems to suggest a military commission.)
4. "For the sake of Christ" is employed instead of "for his name's sake," since modern English does not use "name" in the Semitic way as a symbolic substitute for the personality. In order to avoid confusion as to whether this was for "God's sake" or for "Christ's sake," the TEV has used the noun rather than the pronominal substitute. This is, of course, made obligatory because "God" is introduced as the subject of the clause.
5. The relationship between the status of "being an apostle" and "the obedience of faith" on the part of all nations is made explicit by introducing the phrase "in order to lead."
6. The verb phrase "believe and obey" is chosen in place of the corresponding noun phrase, since it is more normal in straightforward language to employ verbs, rather than derivative nouns, for events.
7. Since "people among all nations" is the grammatical and semantic subject of the events of believing and obeying, this is made explicit in the TEV by the word order and by the subject-predicate structure, a relationship not so fully evident in the NEB.

Both the NEB and the TEV radically restructure the formal elements of this Greek clause, but it must be noted that they do not introduce any features not clearly implicit in the Greek. They also succeed in reproducing the message of the Greek in a form far more comprehensible than the more literal translation of the RSV. This is the type of faithfulness to the text of the source language which results in alterations of form in order to preserve the content.

Problem 3

In light of the principles stated in this chapter, evaluate the following sets of renderings of Biblical passages:

1. Matt. 3:15:   "for thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness" (KJV).
"we do well to conform in this way with all that God requires" (NEB).
"For in this way we shall do all that God requires" (TEV).

2. Luke 1:1-2:   "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, even as they delivered them

unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses'' (KJV).

"Many people have already written an account of the events which have happened among us, basing their work on the evidence of those who we know were eyewitnesses as well as teachers of the message'' (Phillips).

"Many writers have undertaken to draw up an account of the events that have happened among us, following the traditions handed down to us by the original eyewitnesses and servants of the Gospel'' (NEB).

3. Gal. 2:6: "And from those who were reputed to be something (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who were of repute added nothing to me'' (RSV).

"And as far as the leaders of the conference were concerned (I neither know nor care what their exact position was: God is not impressed with a man's office), they had nothing to add to my gospel'' (Phillips).

"But those who seemed to be the leaders—I say this because it makes no difference to me what they were; for God does not judge by outward appearances—those leaders, I say, made no new suggestions to me'' (TEV).

By comparing two or three versions find five additional examples which illustrate the points made in this chapter.