we shall expand on these two [illegible]

ESTABLISHING A TEXT

When translators of the Bible sit down to do their work, what specifically will they translate—what will they have before them as they work? Among other things, they will have before them printed books, compiled by textual experts, that contain texts of the Bible in a variety of ancient languages. The number of these books may be relatively small, perhaps a half dozen or so, but those few scholarly works will be of such a nature as to provide translators with readings drawn from hundreds of ancient biblical manuscripts. As we reminded readers in chapter 16, the original manuscripts handwritten by the Bible's authors are no longer in existence, nor are the earliest collections of individual biblical writings. The oldest manuscripts that textual scholars can draw on for the benefit of translators date from hundreds of years after the biblical writings were composed. As copies were made from copies during those hundreds of years, alterations in the texts were inevitably introduced by the copyists, sometimes intentionally, sometimes unintentionally. Also, as we pointed out in chapter 16, alternative versions of some biblical books may have circulated right from the beginning. Thus our earliest surviving biblical manuscripts differ from one another at point after point.

A single set of readings drawn from all the sources at any given point in the biblical text is called the "textual variants" or "variant readings" for that point. It is important that biblical scholars, including translators, be able to know what these variant readings are for any biblical passage they are working on. In order that the variants may be readily available, they are printed as footnotes in the ancient-language printed editions of the Bible prepared for scholars. Also in those notes will be many proposed emendations of the biblical text—informed guesses about what the original text may *really* have been at this point or that point, where error or interference with the text are suspected. The total number of variant readings and proposed emendations for the whole Bible is now in the hundreds of thousands, and the number will increase as additional ancient manuscripts are found and as textual

scholars continue their work. The largest proportion of variants involves minor matters of spelling and grammar, but many thousands concern matters more significant than those.

The rich resources provided by textual scholarship are a great boon to translators, of course. But they force on translators the necessity of making decision after decision about just what it is they are going to translate: At any given point should they take this reading from one manuscript, that reading from another, or a third reading proposed as an emendation? Translators can simplify their problem by following closely the form of the text given in a scholarly edition, a text based on some single ancient manuscript or one put together from many sources by reputable textual scholars. But there will still be many places where individual translators will have their doubts about the accuracy or appropriateness of the text they are following. Often they will wish to select from the footnotes an emendation proposed by some scholar or a reading found in some manuscript other than the one their chosen edition presents. Or they will wish to insert a word or passage not found in the text before them or to omit one that is.

All of this is very complex and potentially tedious. The point of presenting it here is to demonstrate that, before scholars begin translating the Bible, they must choose which overall version of the original-language texts they are going to use as the basis of their work; then they must continue choosing among individual readings as they arrive at hard spot after hard spot. Anyone who demands that they translate "the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible" is imagining an entity that does not exist. In effect, there *is* no Bible until the translators construct one out of the myriad possibilities available in their sources.

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN LANGUAGES

We said earlier that the one reason why a completely faithful translation of the Bible cannot be made is that complete faithfulness in translating is impossible to attain. The ideal of translation is to carry over, from the original language to the "receptor" language, the whole sense and nothing but the sense of the work in hand. But that ideal can never be achieved. Any translation of literary material from one language to another will always, inevitably, leave some portion of the original sense behind and will impose some additional sense of its own. This is so for the reason that no two languages have a simple one-to-one relationship with one another. That is, all languages differ from one another in ways far more profound than just having different vocabularies. Thus, translation cannot be done simply by proceeding word by word through the original and turning each word into a corresponding [illegible] language.

Consider the problem first on the basic level of the lexicon—that is, the words available in each of the two languages a translator is dealing with. Seldom will there be words in one language that correspond exactly with words in another. There will be a great number of *approximately* corresponding words, of course, that will overlap in one or several senses; however, each word in a pair can have additional senses that the other word does not have. To capture all the possible senses of the Hebrew word *derek*, for example, a whole set of English words has to be drawn on: "way," "distance," "road," "journey," "manner," and others. Which one of these senses will be appropriate for any given occurrence of *derek* in the Hebrew Bible? Context will of course be the major determinant, for it will make plain whether "distance" or "road" is the sense of *derek* intended by the author. But context will often not be sufficient for determining which sense a word in the original should be assigned. The word *elohim* can mean either "gods" or "God"; in several significant places (Exodus 32:4, for example) it is unclear which sense the word has. Similarly, Hebrew *ruaḥ* can mean either "wind," "breath," or "spirit"; there is no certainty which of these senses the author of Genesis 1:2 intended when he wrote that the *ruaḥ* of (or from) God moved over the primeval abyss. When context does not provide certainty, translators must nevertheless choose one or another of the possible senses to put into their text. The other sense or senses they may wish to indicate in a footnote to the text.

Just as the senses of "equivalent" words in any two languages will not correspond exactly, neither will grammatical and syntactical structures. It is difficult for persons with little experience of a second language to believe that other languages work differently from their own. But it is a fact that there are languages in the world that, unlike English, lack a passive voice or that assign gender to inanimate objects or that have no rhetorical questions or that do not employ a past/present/future tense system or that always indicate whether a named person is dead or alive, and so on and so on. The original languages of the Bible have their share of features quite unlike anything in English, requiring that translators make radical adjustments in producing a readable English equivalent. Consider the following: (1) Hebrew verbs express not the time of an action but rather whether the specified action is complete or incomplete. Tenses can usually be fairly easily assigned to such verbs, although less easily in prophetic writings, where there are rapid shifts back and forth among past, present, and future. But in assigning tenses, translators will often choose to leave unexpressed the completeness/incompleteness element because English has only awkward ways to handle that. (2) Hebrew displays much less subordination of one clause to another than does English, and in general it lacks ver-

great variety of words that indicate logical connections between clauses and phrases. In Hebrew narrative, sentence units tend to be strung out one after another in boxcar fashion and to be hooked together by means of a single, all-purpose connective that is usually translated "and" in the KJV. In Genesis 19:1–3 that connective occurs seventeen times in the Hebrew and is translated "and" every time but once in the KJV. Note the effect this has in the following verse (Gen. 19:3): "*And* he pressed upon them greatly; *and* they turned in unto him, *and* entered into his house; *and* he made them a feast, *and* did bake unleavened bread, *and* they did eat" (emphasis added). Modern translators could not get away with such choppy construction, nor would they want to. They would represent the Hebrew connective not merely with "and" but with "when," "but," "however," and so on (depending on context) or at times would simply omit it. (3) Greek verbs indicate time of action more definitely than Hebrew verbs do, but they also indicate nature of action (whether linear, recurring, or completed). Greek verbs are thus very complex in meaning, and translators who attempt to capture *all* of the potential meaning will risk overloading their English and producing a translation so clumsy as to be unreadable.

Along with words and structures not directly translatable, there are in every language idioms—certain set expressions that have developed solely within that language and have no force outside it. When idioms occur in the Hebrew and Greek of the Bible, translators must choose among several possibilities: (1) they may translate the idiom directly when the result will make some degree of sense in the receptor language; (2) they may capture just the main point of the idiom and abandon its colorful dress; or (3) they may substitute for the idiom an approximately equivalent idiom in the receptor language. We can observe all of these things happening in the translations of 1 Kings 21:21 found in the various English versions. Here is the KJV reading: "Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will take away thy posterity, and will cut off from Ahab him that pisseth against the wall. . . ." The phrase "him that pisseth against the wall" is a literal rendering of the original, a Hebrew idiom that occurs six times in the Old Testament, always in the setting of a curse. It is (as the reader will realize with a little reflection) a poetic if vulgar way of referring to males as opposed to females: Only males can urinate against walls. It is possible to translate this idiom literally, as was done in the KJV for an early seventeenth-century audience. But the resulting English will nowadays be considered offensive by many (particularly when the Bible is read publicly), and not everyone will understand that the phrase denotes specifically male offspring. For these reasons, some

modern translations render the Hebrew idiom simply as "every male" or "every last male." But others make an effort to capture the energy of the Hebrew with a forceful English idiom, giving us "every mother's son" in the NEB and "every manjack" in the NJB. Both of these reflect the racy, hard-hitting quality of the original without forcing its vulgarity on the sensitivities of a modern audience. Idioms always provide special difficulty for translators; the satisfactory handling of them is one of the hallmarks of a good translation.

The problem of how to represent idioms leads naturally to the related problem for the translator of how to represent literary forms. In both cases the question is how to carry over to the reader not only the *sense* of the original but the *means* by which that sense is achieved. In a poetic construction, as in an idiom, the means of expression draws attention to itself and is indeed an inherent part of the sense itself. (To leave behind the vulgarity in the idiom discussed earlier is to leave behind some part of the sense.) We can see the problem of literary form acutely, although on a small scale, in the case of puns. The Hebrew Bible abounds in puns. One notable kind involves placing together words of similar sounds but different senses. The difficulty in translating puns is to come up with a set of words in the receptor language that will represent both the sound and the sense of the set of punning words in the original. Consider Genesis 2:7: "Yahweh God shaped man [Hebrew *adam*] from the soil of the ground [Hebrew *adamah*]." There exists no combination of English words that can capture both the *different senses* and the *shared sounds* of the two Hebrew words here; so translators must represent the sense and forego the sounds. Translators have better luck in dealing with the wordplay in Genesis 2:23, where Adam says concerning the newly created Eve, "She is to be called Woman [Hebrew *ishshah*], / because she was taken from Man [Hebrew *ish*]." Happily, the English words "woman" and "man" share sounds in quite the way that *ishshah* and *ish* do, while also having the required contrasting senses. But this situation is quite rare; in most cases, translators must abandon the sound element of puns to get the sense.

And what is true of puns is true of all other literary forms: The burden of sense that a literary device carries can be translated, but not much or any at all of the form itself—and thus not the nuance of meaning and potential for delight that is inherent in artistic form. Consider the challege that Psalms 111, 112, and 119 and Lamentations 3 present to the translator. Each of these chapters is, in the Hebrew original, an alphabetical acrostic poem—that is, in each of them the initial letter of the first line (or group of lines) is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the initial letter of the second line is the second letter of the He-

brew alphabet, and so on through all twenty-two letters of that alphabet. Should English translators of these poems try, while capturing the sense of the words, to capture this artistic element as well? Unfortunately, there is no way they can. There are twenty-six letters in the English alphabet, not twenty-two; and English letters are not the same as those in Hebrew. The acrostic feature simply cannot be accommodated when these Hebrew poems are translated into a language with a different sort of alphabet.

In general we can say that the approximate sense of a passage, the order of the points it makes, and its tone can be translated; but most elements of its form and sound, including rhythm and rhyme and wordplay, cannot be translated, although they can be equivalenced. This does not mean, however, that poetic form should be ignored by the translator or its existence hidden from the eyes of the reader. That a poetic passage is poetic is one of the most important things to know about it: We are prepared to understand a passage that we take to be poetry differently from the way we understand one that we take to be prose. It is important then that translations of poetry at least *look* like poetry, although many of the poetic effects of the original cannot be represented in the translation. One of the great virtues of modern translations of the Bible is that in all of them attention has been given to presenting poetry as poetry.

HOW TO CHOOSE A TRANSLATION

A reader of the Bible in English is faced with a wide range of modern translations to select from. Not only are there the half-dozen major versions mentioned at the end of our historical survey of translations, there are also scores of lesser-known twentieth-century English versions of the whole Bible or its parts. How is a reader to choose among them? What criteria should guide one's choice? Should one take into account, for example, the theological position of those who produced a translation that one is interested in?

THE QUESTION OF THEOLOGICAL BIAS

Well, there is no ignoring the fact that most Bible translating is paid for by religious organizations and performed by individuals with a specific religious commitment. One can suppose that those involved have employed a chain of reasoning something like this: "The Bible is supremely important to persons of our religious persuasion. Because few of our number can read it in the original languages, an English translation is necessary. We have our own unique view of the Bible; therefore, we would do well to make our own translation."

It would be a wonder if a translation deriving from this sort of reasoning did not to some extent reflect the theology of those who produced it. Wherever (as is often the case) the Hebrew or Greek texts are unclear or ambiguous—wherever words and expressions in the original can legitimately have any one of several senses—translators with a specific religious commitment will understandably (and sometimes unconsciously) be prone to choose a sense that accords with their own views and those of their intended audience.

Isaiah 7:14 is perhaps the most notable place where this happens. In this passage the prophet Isaiah tells the king of Judah that a young woman is going to bear a child and name him Immanuel (that is, "God is with us"). The prophet goes on to say that by the time this child leaves infancy, a certain military threat to Judah will have vanished. The Hebrew term for the female here, *ha-almah*, designates some specific young woman of marriageable age. When this passage was translated into Greek in the Septuagint, *ha-almah* was represented by a Greek word meaning not only "young woman" but also "virgin" in our modern sense. And when the Greek passage was later quoted by the author of Matthew's gospel, it was set in a context requiring that the young woman be understood *specifically* as a virgin and that the birth thus be a miraculous birth. Conservative Christians who hold to the view that there can be no discrepancies in the Bible (and who also place a high value on the doctrine of the Virgin Birth), believe that if the young woman is said to be a virgin in the New Testament passage, she must be understood to be a virgin in the original Hebrew passage. Thus, translations made by and for conservative Christian groups will "conserve" the traditional view and use the word "virgin" in Isaiah 7:14, although the Hebrew term in question does not require that sense and its immediate context works against it.

FORMAL CORRESPONDENCE VERSUS DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE

Although there is plentiful opportunity for this sort of shaping of a translation in line with theological views, it in fact occurs so rarely in the major modern translations that beginning Bible readers need not hesitate on this particular score to use any one of them. A far more important element to take into account in choosing a translation is the literalness or freedom of the versions available and what one's personal preferences are in this matter. Actually the terms "literalness" and "freedom" do not well express the point at issue here. The terms "formal correspondence" and "dynamic equivalence" have been coined by translation theorists to designate the two ends of a spectrum of possibilities in translation. Formal correspondence has been defined

as the "quality of a translation in which the features of the form of the source text have been mechanically reproduced in the receptor language. Typically, formal correspondence distorts the grammatical and stylistic patterns of the receptor language, and hence distorts the message. . . ." Dynamic equivalence has been defined as the "quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors."* Briefly put, in the former the emphasis is on the *form of the original*, in the latter on the *reader's ability to understand readily*. Note that neither of these elements is good or bad in itself and that it is legitimate to strive for either one in translating. In beginning any translating project, those involved must decide for themselves whether to favor the demands of the form or the needs of the reader. Just where the translators place themselves on the spectrum between these two positions will determine the kind of translation they produce.

When choosing among translations, readers should use the characteristic combination of formal correspondence and dynamic equivalence in each as a major factor in their choice. If one wishes to move slowly through the Bible, studying it chapter by chapter, or if one needs an English translation as a help in beginning the study of biblical Hebrew and Greek, one should choose a translation embodying a high degree of formal correspondence: the Revised Standard Version, say, or the New American Standard Bible or the New International Version. If one wishes to read through the Bible in such a way as to become generally familiar with it, or if one intends to read the Bible aloud to others, one should select a translation embodying a high degree of dynamic equivalence: the Revised English Bible, say, or the New American Bible, the New Jerusalem Bible, or Today's English Version.

Consider the differences between the following two translations of Romans 5:12–13:

> Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned—for until the Law sin was in the world; but sin is not imputed when there is no law. (NASB)

> Sin came into the world through one man, and his sin brought death with it. As a result, death has spread to the whole human race because everyone has sinned. There was sin in the world before the Law was given; but where there is no law, no account is kept of sins. (TEV)

*Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969), pp. 200, 201.

The first of these embodies formal correspondence, the second dynamic equivalence. One learns from the first as much as any translation can teach about the close details of sense, form, and order of the original while still being within the limits of recognizable English. The second gives the general sense of the passage in easily accessible English at the expense of the close details. A reader will find one of these appropriate in certain circumstances, the other appropriate in other circumstances.

Can translators go too far in one direction or another? Yes, without a doubt. In the direction of formal correspondence, they may go so far as to produce a work that is more Hebrew or Greek than English. In the direction of dynamic equivalence, they may go so far as to produce a text that is smoother and easier for modern readers than it ever was for its first readers. In this latter case the translators' concern for their readers' limited abilities may prompt them to indulge in interpretation rather than translation of the text. There is a fine line that divides making the sense of the original clear and interpreting that sense, and translators must be careful not to cross it. That line was certainly crossed by the producers of one nineteenth-century revision of the KJV. These revisers believed firmly that baptizing in biblical times was done in only one way—by immersing converts in water—and they felt that the world needed this truth plainly stated. So wherever they found any form of the word "baptize" in the KJV, they substituted the appropriate form of "immerse" for it. They laid hands even on John the Baptist, renaming him "John the Immerser"! This kind of "help" for readers belongs in clearly labeled interpretive notes to the English text, not, misleadingly, in the text itself.

USING SEVERAL TRANSLATIONS

To be dependent on a translation, as most Bible readers are, is to be dependent on a number of qualities in the makers of the translations: how much they know of the Bible's original languages and of the cultures, religious systems, and historical situations that produced the original texts; the depth of their commitment to scholarly objectivity; their skill and imagination in using the receptor language—in our case, English; and their awareness of the true nature of the process of translating. Average readers of the Bible are not equipped or inclined to consider whether the translation they are using was produced by persons possessed of all these qualities; they just assume that what they have before them is the Bible—and that's that. But allow us to suggest a simple way for average readers to limit their dependence on the abilities and efforts of a single translator or set of

translators. That way is merely to make use of more than one translation. By consulting two or three versions, readers can double or triple the number of expert opinions available to them about the meaning of a given passage. At the very least, this will impress on readers a fundamental truth about translations of the Bible: Each one embodies thousands upon thousands of individual decisions about (1) what constitutes the proper text in the first place, (2) what its sense is, and (3) how the sense can best be represented in the receptor language. More pointedly, of course, a comparison of translations will indicate how much confidence an interpreter can put in some particular version's rendering of a given passage. Before investing too much effort in discussing a passage, the interpreter had better be sure that in the original language it has a clear sense that *can* be interpreted.

As an illustration of what one can learn from a comparison of translations, consider the form that Proverbs 18:19 takes in two English Bibles:

> An offended brother is more unyielding than a fortified city, and disputes are like the barred gates of a citadel. (NIV)
>
> A brother helped is like a strong city, but quarreling is like the bars of a castle. (RSV)

Note that in the first translation the brother had been offended, in the second helped. As though that were not confusing enough, there is a widely divergent reading in another version:

> A brother is a better defense than a strong city, and a friend is like the bars of a castle. (NAB)

Here there is nothing negative whatever, only the helpful brother and friend. The explanation for these considerably different versions is that there are variant readings for several words in the Hebrew of Proverbs 18:19, giving us a text sufficiently uncertain that three bodies of scholars have assigned it three different meanings.

A particularly profitable comparison of translations can be done on a passage we looked at in chapter 9 but that now deserves a second look in the context of translation. The passage is a crucial one, Job 13:15, in which the tormented Job speaks of God. Consider the difference between these two versions:

> Though he slay me, yet will I hope in him;
> I will surely defend my ways to his face. (NIV)
>
> Behold he will slay me; I have no hope;
> yet I will defend my ways to his face. (RSV)

If the first form represents the sense of what the author actually wrote, then we have one kind of Job: a man who, with divine complicity, is suffering terribly but who nevertheless trusts in God's good intentions toward him. If the second version represents what the author intended, then we have another kind of Job: a man who sticks his chin out and says *he* is not afraid of a bullying deity and will insist on speaking the truth. These two senses are possible because there are two different readings in the Hebrew manuscripts available to us. Actually the difference lies in only one letter in one word, but what a difference it makes, giving us a Job who is either a hero of the faith or a rebel against God! The whole context of the passage favors the negative statement. But because pious translators through the centuries (and before them pious editors of the Hebrew text) have recoiled at the thought of a rebellious Job, they have acted on the slim possibility that the positive wording was legitimate and thus have tried to save Job's reputation (although Job, in fact, says very negative things about God elsewhere in the poetic portions of the book). Here we have a case where the translators' desire to maintain a religious tradition has determined what sense they assigned a passage.

A reader interested in pursuing the comparison of translations further may wish to perform the laborious but fascinating exercise of examining each of the following passages as they are represented in a number of English versions (including the KJV and the NJB): Genesis 1:1–2, 21:14; Exodus 6:4, 32:4; Leviticus 16:8; Deuteronomy 4:19; Judges 1:14; 1 Samuel 13:1; Job 9:20; Psalm 2:2, 7; Amos 5:25–26; Jonah 3:3; Micah 4:5; Matthew 6:13; Mark 7:16; Luke 9:55–56; John 14:30–31; Acts 10:19; Romans 8:28; 1 Peter 3:18–19. In examining these passages (and any of the earlier ones cited in this chapter), readers should be sure to consult the textual footnotes in those translations that have them. In one view of things, it would be well for a translation to indicate in the notes every Hebrew and Greek variant reading *not* selected for rendering into English and every possible alternative sense of the Hebrew and Greek that *was* chosen. But that would make for such a vast number of notes that the notes would bulk as large as the text itself. What translators do (those who provide any notes at all) is to present only a selection of variant readings and alternative senses. Careful readers should always make the effort to consult the notes if their translations have them, for consulting the notes—like reading a passage in multiple translations—keeps one constantly aware of the degree of uncertainty that exists with respect to both the state of the text and its meaning.