

# A LONG HISTORY OF SOWING, FROM WHICH MIRACLES OCCASIONALLY GROW: BIBLE TRANSLATIONS IN LANGUAGE THAT IS JUST

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Bible translations do not appear out of nowhere, but emerge under certain social conditions and from within specific power networks. Furthermore, translations are always influenced by preconceptions and by the theologies of those involved, as well as other contextual factors.<sup>2</sup> These include economic considerations, images of the Bible as a cultural asset,<sup>3</sup> and issues of theological/church teaching and authority.<sup>4</sup> Since the Bible was, and is, often perceived

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1. Both authors were involved at the origin of the German inclusive language Bible translation “Bibel in gerechter Sprache,” a title invoking notions of justice. A comparative analysis of Bible translations that also considers the development in all areas of the world and in languages of differing structures and gender designations has yet to be undertaken. See, however, Satoko Yamaguchi, “Father Image of G\*d and Inclusive Language: A Reflection in Japan,” in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza* (ed. Fernando F. Segovia; Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2003), 199–224.

2. Translation scholar Heidemarie Salevsky refers both to a network of antinomies and to a wealth of influences that are significant for biblical translation and its evaluation; see Heidemarie Salevsky, “Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit bei der Bibelübersetzung: Ein Beitrag aus translationswissenschaftlicher Sicht am Beispiel der Hagar-Geschichte (Gen 16; 21; 25),” in *Heidemarie Salevsky: Aspekte der Translation. Ausgewählte Beiträge zur Translation und Translationswissenschaft* (ed. Ina Müller; Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2009), 19–20; Heidemarie Salevsky (collaborating with Ina Müller and Bernd Salevsky), *Translationswissenschaft: Ein Kompendium* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2002), 337–38.

3. This applies in particular to languages in which individual translations were widely distributed and culturally influential, such as the King James Bible and the Luther Bible.

4. The Roman Catholic Fifth Instruction for the Right Implementation of the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy of the Second Vatican Council–Liturgiam Authenticam of 7.5.2001 makes this clear. Some Protestants also consider authorization of translations by the church in compliance with dogmatic teaching as necessary. See the statement of

as an important document for independent faith and for legitimizing religious institutions, the history of Bible translation is marked by conflict. These conflicts, which at times have been life-threatening for translators, continue today as translators are accused of heresy.<sup>5</sup> Bible translations appear to serve as crystallization points for different debates and for opening up a wealth of conflicting emotions. The increasing public awareness of Bible translations offers the opportunity to discuss topics and positions in depth beyond those groups that are invested in “pure” theological sciences, particularly those interested in feminism, social sciences, liberation theology, or Christian-Jewish dialogue.

### 1. FROM ANTIDISCRIMINATION LEGISLATION TO NEW BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

The use of “inclusive language”<sup>6</sup> in the United States is connected with the civil rights movement and especially the women’s movement. In 1972 and 1973, the U.S. American National Organization for Women made contact with Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish Bible translation projects in order to bring its influence to bear on the deletion of an unjustifiable masculinization in Bible translations.<sup>7</sup> UNESCO also has issued guidelines for combating sexist and discriminatory language.<sup>8</sup> These guidelines are based on the view

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Rat der Evangelischen Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) (Council of Protestant Churches in Germany) on the “Bibel in gerechter Sprache” (March 31, 2007); online: [http://www.ekd.de/presse/pm67\\_2007\\_bibel\\_in\\_gerechter\\_sprache.html](http://www.ekd.de/presse/pm67_2007_bibel_in_gerechter_sprache.html).

5. See Martin Leutzsch, “Bibelübersetzung als Skandal und Verbrechen,” in *Bibel-Impulse: Film–Kunst–Literatur–Musik–Theater–Theologie* (ed. Rainer Dillmann; INPUT 5; Berlin, 2006), 42–57. See further the discussion surrounding the “Bibel in gerechter Sprache,” particularly the accusation of heresy by Ulrich Wilckens, “Theologisches Gutachten zur ‘Bibel in gerechter Sprache,’” in *epd-Dokumentation* 17/18 (2007): 24–38. For the rejection of this accusation, see Luise Schottroff, “Stellungnahme zum theologischen Gutachten von Ulrich Wilckens zur Bibel in gerechter Sprache,” in *epd-Dokumentation* 31 (2007): 34–37.

6. The term was and is variable, depending on which aspects of discriminatory language are to be avoided. Comprehensive current guidelines are, e.g., the University of Wisconsin at Madison’s *A Guide to Bias-Free Communication: A Reference for Preparing Official University Publications*; online: [http://academicaffairs.ucsd.edu/\\_files/aps/adeo/Article\\_Guide\\_to\\_Bias-Free\\_Communications.pdf](http://academicaffairs.ucsd.edu/_files/aps/adeo/Article_Guide_to_Bias-Free_Communications.pdf).

7. Martin Leutzsch, “Inklusive Sprache in der Bibelübersetzung” in *DIE BIBEL–übersetzt in gerechte Sprache? Grundlagen einer neuen Übersetzung* (ed. Helga Kuhlmann; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2005), 202.

8. The UNESCO Guidelines for English and French were issued in 1987 and subsequently revised. The third revised edition of 1999 is available online under the modified title *Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language/Pour l’égalité des sexes dans le langage* at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950mo.pdf>. These guidelines are the basis

that a modified pattern of language also creates a corresponding change in personal attitudes towards discriminated groups of the population. Equivalent standards for Bible translation were also being demanded in this regard. In 1974, the Division of Education and Ministry of the National Council of the Christian Churches in the U.S.A. set up a “Task Force on Sexism in the Bible” with women who had a proven academic track record. One result was the publication in 1976 of *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Non-Sexist Interpretation of the Bible*.<sup>9</sup> In addition to key questions on hermeneutics, it also referred to the connection between linguistic modification and church reform.<sup>10</sup>

The suggestions of the task force were adopted by the “Inclusive Language Lectionary” (ILL), which appeared in 1983.<sup>11</sup> The translation committee had the task of revising the Revised Standard Version (RSV), considered to be the standard scientific translation at that time, “only in those places where male-biased or otherwise inappropriately exclusive language could be modified to reflect an inclusiveness of all persons.”<sup>12</sup> This was carried out in reference to human language as well as in reference to the language about Christ and God.

Parallel to the work on the ILL, a revision of the RSV was initiated. In the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), which appeared in 1990,<sup>13</sup> change

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of the version published by the German UNESCO Committee in 1993; see [http://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Bibliothek/eine\\_sprache.pdf](http://www.unesco.de/fileadmin/medien/Dokumente/Bibliothek/eine_sprache.pdf). A Spanish version *Recomendaciones para un uso no sexista del lenguaje* is online at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950so.pdf>. The versions are not translations but are adapted to the corresponding language and cultural grouping.

9. Letty M. Russell, ed., *The Liberating Word: A Guide to Nonsexist Interpretation of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1977). The German translation neither uses inclusive language nor mentions the organizational context: Letty M. Russell, ed., *Als Mann und Frau ruft er uns: Vom nicht-sexistischen Gebrauch der Bibel* (Munich: Pfeiffer, 1979).

10. See Letty M. Russell, “Sprachveränderung und Kirchenreform,” in Russell, *Als Mann und Frau ruft er uns*, 70–84.

11. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Division of Education and Ministry, ed. *An Inclusive Language Lectionary: Readings for Year A* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1983); *Readings for Year B* (1984); *Readings for Year C* (1985). This lectionary was compiled by Robert A. Bennett, Dianne Bergant, Victor Roland Gold (chairperson), Thomas Hoyt Jr., Kellie C. Jones, Patrick D. Miller Jr., Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, Sharon H. Ringe (vice-chairperson), Susan Thistlethwaite, Burton H. Throckmorton Jr., and Barbara A. Withers.

12. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Division of Education and Ministry, ed., *Readings for Year A*, under “Preface.”

13. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America, Division of Christian Education, ed. *New Revised Standard Version Bible: The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments with the Apocryphal/Deuterocanonical Books* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989). At the time of the publication of the NRSV, the translation

was restricted entirely to the language about human beings and limited to cases in which, according to the opinion of the translation committee, inclusive language could be used without altering passages that would be appropriate to the patriarchal historical context. Androcentric language continues to be used in reference to God in the NRSV. These moderate changes of the English translation tradition, however, were met with vehement criticism. For example, the authorization of the NRSV in the Roman Catholic Church was countermanded because of the inclusive language used by the Vatican's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith at the end of 1994.<sup>14</sup> Inclusive language with respect to humans was also taken up in other Bible translation projects and was successful to varying degrees, although criticized by conservative groups.<sup>15</sup>

*The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version*,<sup>16</sup> published by six of the eleven members of the ILL committee, is based on the NRSV but goes beyond it insofar as it uses not only gender but also race, class, or disability

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committee consisted of thirty people, including a Jewish man and four women; see "Frequently Asked Questions" (<http://www.nrsv.net/about/faqs/>).

14. See Catherine Wessinger, "Key Events for Women's Religious Leadership in the United States: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream* (ed. Catherine Wessinger; Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 347–401.

15. See, e.g., New Century Version (1986, 1987, 1988), New American Bible (1988, 1990), The Message (1993), The New International Reader's Version (1994, 1996), Contemporary English Version (1995), New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (1995), New Living Translation (1996, 2004, 2007), New English Translation (1998), Today's New International Version (2002 NT, 2005 entire Bible). Each of these translations has its own guidelines regarding inclusive language. See, e.g., the webpage for the New Living Translation at [www.newlivingtranslation.com/05discoverthenlt/faqs.asp?faq=12#go12](http://www.newlivingtranslation.com/05discoverthenlt/faqs.asp?faq=12#go12). An examination of these respective guidelines, their changes, and the particular translation practice would require its own research work. For the discussion within the evangelical area in the U.S.A. alone, see Nancy A. Hardesty, *Inclusive Language in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1987); Donald A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Wayne A. Grudem and Vern S. Poythress, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000); Mark L. Strauss, "Current Issues in the Gender-Language Debate: A Response to Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem," in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World* (ed. Glen G. Scorgie et al.; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 115–41; Wayne A. Grudem and Vern S. Poythress, *The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2004).

16. Victor Roland Gold et al., eds. *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

in order to underscore that all are addressed by the New Testament and the Psalms. Furthermore, in contrast to the NRSV, this translation uses inclusive metaphors for God.<sup>17</sup>

Independently of the translation projects mentioned so far, Priests for Equality, a Catholic reform movement established in the U.S.A. compiled its own translation of the Bible in 1975.<sup>18</sup> In light of the official policy of the Roman Catholic Church, it soon became clear to Priests for Equality, who from the outset were committed to nonsexist language, that a change in language needed to be supported by a grassroots movement. As a result, Priests for Equality completed a translation of the New Testament in 1994, followed shortly by translations of the Psalms and the Old Testament with the apocryphal/Deuterocanonical writings found in the Roman Catholic Bible by 2007. In the first partial editions, the Tetragrammaton<sup>19</sup> was rendered “Adonai,” which was transcribed after 2004 as “YHWH,” with the following recommendation:

When you approach the four-lettered name of God, you pause for a moment in prayerful reflection. When reading the scriptures aloud, you may choose to pronounce the Name as “Yahweh,” or substitute such epithets as Holy One, Our God, the Most High, Ha-Shem, the I Am, or other names that speak to your heart and communicate your understanding of the Divine Mystery. Whatever you choose, however, choose with reflection and reverence.<sup>20</sup>

Introductions, particularly to the partial editions, provide information on procedures, aims, contributors, and bases of the translation. The intention is to make the Bible accessible to all, particularly to those for whom sexist language is sometimes an insurmountable barrier to their life of faith. It is emphasized, however, that there are sections of the Bible that cannot be translated into inclusive language, but require theological revision. The contributors agreed on a series of guidelines, which they followed from the first to the

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17. *Ibid.*, viii–xi.

18. The starting point was a charter originally signed by seventy-five Roman Catholic priests in which they campaigned for equal opportunities in society and in the Roman Catholic Church, including women’s ordination to the priesthood.

19. On the Tetragrammaton, see Georg Howard, “The Tetragram and the New Testament,” *JBL* 96 (1977): 63–76; Kristin De Troyer, “The Names of God, Their Pronunciation and Their Translation: A Digital Tour of Some of the Main Witnesses,” *lectio difficilior* 2/2005; online: [http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/05\\_2/troyer\\_names\\_of\\_god.htm](http://www.lectio.unibe.ch/05_2/troyer_names_of_god.htm); De Troyer, “The Choice is Yours! On Names of God,” *JESWTR* 14 (2006): 53–66.

20. Priests for Equality, *The Prophets* (vol. 2 of *The Inclusive Hebrew Bible*; Lanham, Md.: AltaMira, 2004), xxii.

last partial volume. The intention to create a critical feminist biblical interpretation of scripture that is inclusive both in terms of content and style remained constant.

Around the same time, David E. S. Stein published a New Jewish Publication Society's (NJPS) translation of the Torah in 2006 entitled *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (CJPS), which adapts a well-known English Jewish translation in terms of gender.<sup>21</sup> The CJPS attempts to delineate how the original target group would have understood a text, as grammatically masculine terms did not necessarily suggest the male gender. Using the example of *'ish*, Stein illustrates how the lexical findings are also misleading, as the term usually translated as "man" does not necessarily refer to a "male adult" but rather concerns social roles and positions.<sup>22</sup> In addition to this sensitivity in relation to language about people, the translation focuses on the fact that gender-specific terms are dispensed with when referring to God:

In the absence of contextual indications that gender was germane, I rendered the Torah's references to divine beings in gender-neutral terms.... In practice, such a rendering meant recasting NJPS to avoid gendered pronouns for God.<sup>23</sup>

The Tetragrammaton is expressed in unpunctuated Hebrew letters in the English text. The reading instructions in the foreword state: "We invite those who read this translation aloud to pronounce the name via whatever term that they customarily use for it."<sup>24</sup> This means that both the Priests for Equality and the CJPS think users are capable of reading God's name in an appropriate form at any time without directly dictating how this should be done.

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21. In addition to David E. S. Stein as revising editor, Adele Berlin, Ellen Frankel, and Carol L. Meyers are listed as consulting editors, whose collaboration is described in more detail in the foreword; see David E. S. Stein, *The Contemporary Torah: A Gender-Sensitive Adaptation of the JPS Translation* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2006), i and xx.

22. *Ibid.*, xxiv–xxv, xxxi, xxxv n. 31, as well as the entry under *'ish* in the "Dictionary of Gender in the Torah," 394–95, which states at the beginning: "The present translation takes as the primary sense of *'ish* (and its effective plural, *'anashim*), 'a representative member of a group: a member who serves as a typical or characteristic example.'" On the translation of *'ish*, see also the detailed background material under the title "What Does It Mean to Be a 'Man'? The Noun *'ish* in Biblical Hebrew: A Reconsideration" (<http://scholar.davidesstein.name/Memoranda.htm>).

23. See Stein, *Contemporary Torah*, xxvii–xxviii, here xxvii. On the classification of the changes, see xxviii.

24. *Ibid.*, xxvii.

## 2. "INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE" TRANSLATIONS IN GERMANY

The lectionary (ILL) in particular, but also the inclusive translations of the New Testament and the Psalms, have encouraged women in Germany to translate the Bible into language that is just. The Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland e. V. (EFD) (Federation of Protestant Women's Organizations in Germany) provided a brochure entitled "Gerechte Sprache in Gottesdienst und Kirche" (Language That Is Just in Worship and the Church) for the Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag (German Protestant Church Convention) in 1987 in Frankfurt, which contained "three Bible study texts for the church convention in inclusive versions."<sup>25</sup>

The translation was modified in places in which specifically male terms and images ("Lord," "Father") or male pronouns (he, his) were used for God.... Women are presumably included, but not named ("brother," ... "he") or designated by a deprecatory word ("Weib") according to today's linguistic sensitivity or have fewer opportunities for identification than men (brothers, men of God...). Believers of other religions ("heathens") or people with disabilities ("the blind") are discriminated against linguistically.<sup>26</sup>

The foreword states that, despite the reference to the Inclusive Language Lectionary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the United States, the term "inclusive language" could not be adopted because it is easily misunderstood. "Indeed, we do not want any kind of language that 'includes' and designates women in male terms."<sup>27</sup> The group chose the designation language that does justice to women (*frauengerecht*). Women are not a minority alongside others who are deprived of justice in our society, but comprise more than half of society as a whole and even more than half of the church.

"Frauengerecht" (just to women) is a language that refers to women and men as being of equal value and equal before the law. It makes the existence and significance of women linguistically visible and recognizes the need of women for self-respect, identity, and encouragement. This language exposes injustice and motivates women to perceive their rights and the rights of other people and to take an active role in the community and church.<sup>28</sup>

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25. Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland, *Gerechte Sprache in Gottesdienst und Kirche: Mit Bibeltexten zum Frankfurter Kirchentag in frauengerechter Sprache* (Frankfurt: Evangelische Frauenarbeit in Deutschland, 1987), 3.

26. Ibid.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid. For an argument against the term "geschlechtergerechte Sprache" (language

The seven general guidelines under the caption: “Language That Is Just Heals—Unjust Language Divides: How Can I Speak ‘Justly’ in an Unjust World?” demonstrates that the focus was broader than justice only for women.<sup>29</sup>

A basic distinction was made between the reading of biblical texts in worship (lectionary), which as proclamation to the assembled congregation cannot exclude anyone, and Bible translation. Worship requires a lectionary that “unveils anew in each case the liberating closeness of God.”<sup>30</sup>

An accurate translation should not disguise the Bible’s patriarchal preconditions. On the other hand, it must not be overlooked that biblical translations and their effects in church tradition are much more patriarchal than the Hebrew or Greek text. The booklet met with a broad response.<sup>31</sup> Alternative versions of Bible texts were printed in the program booklets from the Twenty-Third German Protestant Church Convention (DEKT) from 1989 onward. They were based on the Luther revision current at the time, and modified in places “in which God is referred to in masculine terms and grammatical forms and women are not referred to, or not referred to on equal terms with men.”<sup>32</sup> From the Twenty-fourth German Protestant Church Convention from 1991 onward, translations were compiled by Bible scholars and printed in the program booklet, usually alongside the current Luther revision. In the beginning the Tetragrammaton was rendered with “GOTT” (GOD) and since 1995 as “Adonaj.” Numerous commentaries have used the inclusive language in these Bible translations and have become ever more linguistically articulate and sophisticated in their translation solutions. The introduction to the translations in the DEKT program booklet in 1999 points out that “in other (particularly Anglo-American) countries, the effort made to produce inclusive language when translating biblical texts has a long tradition and has been

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that is just concerning gender), see Senta Trömel-Plotz, “Sprache: Von Frauensprache zu frauengerechter Sprache,” in *Handbuch Frauen- und Geschlechterforschung: Theorie, Methoden, Empirie* (ed. Ruth Becker and Beate Kortendiek; Wiesbaden: Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2004), 749.

29. Evangelische Frauenarbeit, *Gerechte Sprache*, 5.

30. Hanne Köhler, “Frauengerechte Sprache in Gottesdienst und Kirche,” in *Evangelische Frauenarbeit, Gerechte Sprache*, 30. See further 23–31.

31. The booklet appeared in January 1987. Although not available at bookstores, more than seven thousand copies were sold by November, and many were also circulated in photocopied form.

32. 23. Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag Berlin 1989, *Programmheft des 23. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages Berlin, 7.–11. Juni 1989* (Berlin) 13. This version was provided by the Federation of Protestant Women’s Organizations in Germany.



tried and tested in numerous forms,”<sup>33</sup> whereas in the German-speaking area there are scarcely any role models, and the church convention translations are therefore of an innovative nature, but have had far-reaching effects. The contextual nature of the church convention translations, as of all other translations, has been emphasized:

There is no such thing as a correct translation; a decision constantly has to be made as to what should be emphasised and where the weight needs to be placed in this particular instance.<sup>34</sup>

The first ecumenical church convention in 2003 was a step backward regarding Bible translations in inclusive language. However, the DEKT resumed the tradition of church convention translations in 2005 and explained:

Twenty years ago, when theologians began to translate the Biblical texts for the church conventions with the aim of producing them in more just language, this was a new venture in the German-speaking area. Translations of the Bible texts of nine church conventions had become available in the meantime and this work led to other, larger projects.

The church convention translations attempt to meet the following criteria:

1. The translation should be true to the wording of the biblical texts in their Hebrew or Greek original version. These are therefore translations of the Hebrew Bible and the Greek New Testament and not new versions or even “translations” of the Luther Bible.
2. Translation should be in inclusive language. The women referred to, or not expressly referred to but included in the texts themselves, should be visible, and women should be recognizable as addressed today.
3. Such translation should be mindful of Jewish-Christian dialogue and show respect for the Jewish reading of scripture.
4. It should have a mutually comprehensible language. This language must be “easy on the ear.” Yet, when the text itself is cumbersome or ambivalent, this should also be discernible in the translation.

These criteria should also be applied to language about God. God is not a man in the Bible, and the notion of the maleness of God is a violation of the aniconism in the Ten Commandments. Nor should God be discussed predominantly in grammatically male forms. How to handle God’s proper name written in the Hebrew Bible with the consonants *y-h-w-h* is an issue continually discussed since biblical times, and every Bible translation has to find its

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33. 28. Deutscher Evangelischer Kirchentag Stuttgart 1999, *Programmheft des 28. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages Stuttgart, 16.–20. Juni 1999* (Stuttgart), 14.

34. *Ibid.*

own solution. The church convention translations render God's name by the description of authority, "Adonaj."<sup>35</sup>

Today the church convention translations are a fixture of the DEKT. With the generational change of contributors in recent years, the question has also come up as to how innovation can be institutionalized so that the wheel does not continually have to be reinvented. The Federation of Protestant Women's Organizations in Germany (EFD) has not only activated church convention translations, but has been trying to work from the outside toward consideration of an inclusive language in the revision of the Good News Bible. Women's groups were formed for this purpose in 1988 at the initiative of the Theological Consultant of the EFD. They worked intensively in an honorary capacity over a period of eighteen months on revision proposals and made them available to the German Bible Society, which holds the rights to the *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (Good News Bible). A detailed final report with general notes and a wealth of practical proposals for revision from the working groups was introduced by Hildburg Wegener in December 1989 at a conference of German-speaking Bible societies in East Berlin, and subsequently been published.<sup>36</sup> Reactions were cautious to begin with, but the German Bible Society subsequently decided to consider the aspect of inclusive language in relation to people, insofar as they thought it justifiable. Beginning in 1993, two women (Renate Jost and Monika Fander) were therefore invited to sift through the German texts submitted by the exclusively male translators and make suggestions for changes. Since there was no obligation to adopt or agree to their proposals, the two female biblical scholars were only able to achieve a few changes.

The *Gute Nachricht Bibel*, however, has been promoted since it appeared in 1997 as being the first German Bible translation to consider inclusive language.<sup>37</sup> Hildburg Wegener stated in her review that a great deal of work

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35. 30. Deutscher Evangelischer Hannover 2005, *Programmheft des 30. Deutschen Evangelischen Kirchentages Hannover, 25.–29. Mai 2005* (Hannover), 24–25. Jürgen Ebach is listed as the author. After 2005, the Exegetical Outlines with Explanatory Notes on the Translations were no longer published internally but were made generally accessible and decisions made more transparently in a separate issue to the journal *Junge Kirche*.

36. See Siegfried Meurer, "Foreword," in *Die vergessenen Schwestern: Frauengerechte Sprache in der Bibelübersetzung* (ed. Siegfried Meurer; Jahrbuch der Deutschen Bibelgesellschaft [Yearbook of the German Bible Society]: Stuttgart, 1993), 10; and Hildburg Wegener, "Allen die Bibel, die sie brauchen," in Meurer, *Die vergessenen Schwestern*, 13–36.

37. See Hannelore Jahr, "Foreword," in *Die neue Gute Nachricht Bibel* (ed. Hannelore Jahr; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1998), 11: "The fact that for the first time in a German Bible translation, the aspect of "inclusive language" was systematically considered is, however, of fundamental significance." This sentence is almost word for word on the

remained but that the German Bible Society had shown courage, because it had “performed truly pioneering work with the *Gute Nachricht Bibel* in (tempered) inclusive language for the German-speaking context and, in so doing, had hopefully started a process that will continue in the Bible Society, in the churches, and in academic theology.”<sup>38</sup> Evidently Hildburg Wegener’s critical remarks had an impact on the continuing revision of the *Gute Nachricht Bibel*, because some of the phrasing she criticized is no longer included in the later edition of 2000, without this being pointed out in the paratexts.<sup>39</sup>

In 2001, as an independent project, a lectionary with the Bible sections needed for Protestant services of worship was published as a fourth volume of a series of liturgical texts in just and inclusive language.<sup>40</sup> It expressly refers both to the Inclusive Language Lectionary as well as to the Hildburg Wegener’s publications. The Tetragrammaton is rendered in the lectionary as <sup>Adonaj</sup>Gott and it was suggested that either “God” or, in the tradition of church convention translations, “Adonaj” should be read. Rendering it with <sup>Adonaj</sup>Gott makes it immediately recognizable in the text where the Tetragrammaton is in Hebrew.

The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (Bible in Inclusive German), which began in 2001 and was published in 2006, bases its theory and contributors on the experiences with the aforementioned lectionary and church convention translations.<sup>41</sup> It comprises the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, Apocryphal/

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webpage of the German Bible Society in the abstract of the *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (<http://www.die-bibel.de/online-bibeln/gute-nachricht-bibel/ueber-die-gute-nachricht-bibel>). Another modified version of it has appeared in the meantime: Evangelisches Bibelwerk/Katholisches Bibelwerk e.V. Stuttgart/Österreichisches Katholisches Bibelwerk/Schweizerisches Katholisches Bibelwerk, eds., *Gute Nachricht Bibel: Altes und Neues Testament: Mit den Spätschriften des Alten Testaments (Deuterokanonische Schriften/Apokryphen)* (rev. ed.; Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2000).

38. Hildburg Wegener, “... Und macht die Menschen zu meinen Jüngern und Jüngerinnen: Die Revision der *Gute Nachricht Bibel* in gemäßigt ‘frauengerechter Sprache,’” in Jahr, *Die neue Gute Nachricht Bibel*, 73–74.

39. Wegener had demanded, for example, that the translation of Luke 1:38 “be modified as a matter of urgency in view of the discussion on theological aspects of the direct and indirect violence used against women and girls” (ibid., 71). This has happened in the meantime, and instead of “I belong to the Lord, I am entirely at His disposal,” it is now “I belong to the Lord, I am ready.”

40. Erhard Domay and Hanne Köhler, eds., *Der Gottesdienst: Liturgische Texte in gerechter Sprache, Band 4: Die Lesungen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2001). For the translation guidelines, the contributions and individual translation decisions, on which this lectionary is based, see Hanne Köhler, *Gerechte Sprache als Kriterium von Bibelübersetzungen: Von der Entstehung des Begriffs bis zur gegenwärtigen Praxis* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2012).

41. The Bible is edited by Ulrike Bail, Frank Crüsemann, Marlene Crüsemann, Erhard Domay, Jürgen Ebach, Claudia Janssen, Hanne Köhler, Helga Kuhlmann, Martin Leutzsch,

Deuterocanonical writings, and the New Testament. The German title of this project, “Bibel in gerechter Sprache,” encompasses the outlook of the entire program, and this vision can be expressed as the central biblical theme of articulating justice in many different respects. Feminist and liberation theological discourses as well as discussions of Christian anti-Semitism have been considered in addition to historical-exegetical and literary approaches. All translations attempt to be true to the original text, and offer a comprehensible language. The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* comes in addition to the numerous existing German translations. It distinguishes itself not only in its profile, but also because it has disclosed this from the outset, not only in numerous accompanying publications,<sup>42</sup> but also with a programmatic introduction and a detailed glossary. Therefore the theological bases and theoretical issues of the translation process have been the subject of fierce debate since its publication.

The history of this translation<sup>43</sup> makes clear that the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* is the product of a movement. Many aspects have been democratically decided by the translators at conferences, including the representation of God’s name, the names of biblical books, and the selection of glossary terms. The individual books of the Bible were translated by fifty-two commentators, who are actually listed by name in the respective introductions to the books of the Bible.<sup>44</sup> Many of the contributors were already involved in the translations for

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and Luise Schottroff. In 2007, the editorial group was expanded for further work to include Kerstin Schiffner, Johannes Taschner, and Marie-Theres Wacker. Ulrike Bail and Erhard Domay retired. In 2006 there were two editions, and a third appeared in 2007 (total circulation of over 70,000). A revised fourth edition appeared in 2011. For further information, see [www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de](http://www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de).

42. Erhard Domay and Hanne Köhler, eds., *Gottesdienstbuch in gerechter Sprache: Gebete, Lesungen, Fürbitten und Segenssprüche für die Sonn- und Feiertage des Kirchenjahres* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2003); Erhard Domay and Hanne Köhler, eds., *Werkbuch gerechte Sprache in Gemeinde und Gottesdienst: Praxisentwürfe für Gemeindeführung und Gottesdienst* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2003); Erhard Domay et al., eds., *Singen von deiner Gerechtigkeit: Das Gesangbuch in gerechter Sprache* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2005). Christiane Thiel, ed.; *Tageslesebuch: Bibel in gerechter Sprache für jeden Tag des Jahres* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2008); Isa Breitmeier and Luzia Sutter Rehmann, *Gerechtigkeit lernen: Seminareinheiten zu den drei Grundkategorien von Gerechtigkeit* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2008); Martina Gerlach and Monika Weigt-Blattgen, eds., *Gottes Antlitz hülle dich in Licht ... Andachten für Frauen mit der Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2009); Luise Metzler and Katrin Keita, *Bibel in gerechter Sprache: Fragen und Antworten* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2009).

43. See Köhler, *Kriterium*.

44. In translations in inclusive language it is made clear who is responsible for the translation and who has contributed. Many other translations do not contain equivalent details.

DEKT or the Protestant lectionary. This explains the Protestant background of the majority of translators. However, there were some Catholic theologians involved also. The translators of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* are scholars of the Old and New Testaments, who base their translations on dissertations, postdoctoral theses, and other research work. This working process was intensive, as the translations were discussed both in small interdisciplinary groups relating to the books of the Bible (e.g., the Torah group and the group on Paul's letters), as well as in a full plenary session. In addition to this, they have opened themselves up with their still tentative results to an intensive practical test, and have also repeatedly revised the results of their translation in an internal reading process. Over three hundred groups and individuals were involved in this creative process, or "practical review." They have used tentative translations in Bible groups, in teaching or in their own readings, and have fed their experiences back to the translators.

This work was accompanied by an advisory council that publicly supported the project. A basic precondition for the project was that for five years the Protestant regional church in Hesse and Nassau provide a clergy person to organize the entire project. The work was supported by the Gütersloher Verlagshaus (publisher), which prefinanced the conferences. The project was, however, funded solely by donations from individuals and groups, which made it possible for this translation to be financially independent.<sup>45</sup> In addition, the unusual route of carrying out a Bible translation as a project meant that many people were able to identify with it.

Feedback indicates that, beyond the actual translations, many users attribute changes in congregations and social structures to the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*. Even people at the margins of the church see a movement represented in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* that is present in many places. Incidentally, this point is also made clear by the vehement rejections of the project in the press.<sup>46</sup> The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* inspires people and provokes reactions. The introduction to the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* embraces this

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45. The voluntary work of the Donations Officer, Luise Metzler, made a significant contribution to this.

46. A collection of the press reactions can be found at [www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de](http://www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de). Three publications of the Protestant news service contain the controversial discussion in 2007; see *epd Dokumentation* 17/18; 23; and 31 (2007). Reviews predominantly in opposition to the project are available in Elisabeth Gössman et al., eds., *Der Teufel blieb männlich: Kritische Diskussion zur "Bibel in gerechter Sprache"* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2007); Ingolf Dalferth and Jens Schröter, eds., *Bibel in gerechter Sprache? Kritik eines misslungenen Versuchs* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007); Walter Klaiber and Martin Rösel, *Streitpunkt Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2008).

process of discussion of biblical texts and their translation into a contemporary understandable language appropriate to the original texts, and points to the temporary nature of each translation:

The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* already required revision the moment it was published.... We see this Bible translation as our contribution to a constantly new understanding of Biblical texts that have also had impact on our lives and continue to challenge us. This translation is therefore a preliminary stop on a never-ending path. The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* has reached its goal when people are encouraged to take this library of books of the Bible into their own hands, read, and discuss them with others.<sup>47</sup>

Since the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* appeared, interest in theological issues has grown, particularly in the church fellowships and among nonacademic readers of the Bible. In 2011, a revised edition appeared, incorporating the results of the multifaceted discussions and practical experiences with the texts.

Commitment to more inclusive language in Bible translations exists not only in Germany but also in other countries, although such commitment is difficult to demonstrate, given the incomplete publication of decision-making processes which have not so far been published in full. Thus, information on the Zürich Bible in 2007 is available only on a very scattered basis,<sup>48</sup> but shows what efforts have been made to exclude contributions by female theologians and female New Testament scholars. For instance, the decision to render God's name with "Herr" was criticized beyond Switzerland.<sup>49</sup> Because a women's group has published alternative translation proposals, the counter-arguments against numerous decisions by the New Testament section of the Zürich Bible's translation committee (2007) are available in print (no collaboration was formed with the Old Testament translation committee).<sup>50</sup> Why the translation committee did not act on these recommendations is difficult for outsiders who have no access to the internal documents to understand.

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47. Ulrike Bail et al., *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (4th ed.; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2011), 26.

48. See the compilation and the literature in Köhler, *Gerechte Sprache als Kriterium*; also Ute E. Eisen, "'Quasi dasselbe?' Vom schwierigen und unendlichen Geschäft des Bibelübersetzens—Neuere deutsche Bibelübersetzungen," *ZNT* 26 (2010): 4–6.

49. See, e.g., the statement of the 9th International Conference of the European Society for Women in Theological Research (ESWTR) in Salzburg, which was adopted on August 23, 2001. See [http://www.eswtr.org/de/konferenz\\_2001\\_salzburg\\_stellungnahme.html](http://www.eswtr.org/de/konferenz_2001_salzburg_stellungnahme.html).

50. Ursula Sigg-Suter, Esther Straub, and Angela Wäffler-Boveland, "... und ihr werdet mir Söhne und Töchter sein": *Die neue Zürcher Bibel feministisch gelesen* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2007).

Why, for example, did the New Testament committee translate two different Greek verbs in Luke 22:25–26 with the same German verb “to rule over,” when the women’s reading group had suggested different terms (“to demand,” “to head/lead”)?<sup>51</sup> Since these translation decisions were challenged by the women’s reading group, one can only assume that they were made deliberately.

The rendering of God’s name in *De Nieuwe Bijbelvertaling* was also controversial.<sup>52</sup> This Dutch translation had undertaken to avoid exclusive language, among other things, but after controversial discussions<sup>53</sup> on the traditional rendering of God’s name, they had decided to adhere to “HEER” in print but pointed out alternative suggestions on how to read it.<sup>54</sup>

### 3. EVERY TRANSLATION IS AN INTERPRETATION

Translation scholar Heidemarie Salevsky describes translation as a process of transformation that must take into account different causal connections: firstly, the content and meaning of the source text defined by a specific context and the understanding of those that have written it and, secondly, the content and meaning of the target text. Again, translation is influenced by

51. See Sigg-Suter et al., *Söhne und Töchter*, 76.

52. Nederlands Babelgenootschap, *De Nieuwe Bijbel Vertaling (NBV)* (Haarlem: Nederlands Babelgenootschap, 2004). The corrections compiled since it appeared are online at [www.nbv.nl/correcties](http://www.nbv.nl/correcties) only occasionally concern inclusive language (e.g., when it now states in Luke 17:3: “Indien een van je broeders of zusters zondigt, spreek die dan ernstig toe; en als ze berouw hebben, vergeef hun.” [If one of your brothers or sisters sins, rebuke them; and if they repent, forgive them]). The current status is available <http://www.biblija.net/biblija.cgi?l=nl>.

53. See Anneke de Vries and Manuela Kalsky, “Ein Name, der ein Geheimnis bleibt,” *Junge Kirche* 63 (2002): 22–25; Annette Birschel, “Bibel wurde neu ins Niederländische übersetzt,” *Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland* (2004): online: [www.ekd.de/aktuell\\_presse/news\\_2004\\_10\\_27\\_1\\_niederlaendische\\_bibel.html](http://www.ekd.de/aktuell_presse/news_2004_10_27_1_niederlaendische_bibel.html); Lambert Wierenga, “‘Jahwe’ versus ‘HEER’: niets opgelost,” *Nederlands Dagblad* (December 4, 2001); Caroline Vander Stichele, “The Lord Can No Longer Be Taken for Granted: The Rendering of JHWH in the New Dutch Bible Translation,” in *Women, Ritual and Liturgy—Ritual und Liturgie von Frauen—Femmes, rituel et liturgie* (ed. Susan K. Roll et al.; JESWTR Yearbook 9; Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 179–87; Vander Stichele, “Der Herr? Das geht nicht mehr! Die Wiedergabe des Tetragramms in der neuen niederländischen Bibelübersetzung,” in *“Gott bin ich, kein Mann”: Beiträge zur Hermeneutik der biblischen Gottesrede* (ed. Ilona Riedel-Spangenberg and Erich Zenger; Paderborn: Schöningh, 2006), 318–27.

54. See <http://www.nbv.nl/achtergrondinfo/godsnaam>. Caroline Vander Stichele explains here that, in contrast to the German, the Dutch article “de” is grammatically gender neutral. Hence “de Einige” (Only One), for example, can refer both to a male as well as to a female person” (Vander Stichele, “Der Herr,” 323 n. 14).

various factors determined by the translator and her/his specific context is incorporated into the objective. Added to this is the fact that a translation also has its own objective, which is dependent on its historical context: "it involves both reading and rereading as well as writing and re-writing and finally re-translating. Claims that it alone is the truth would have to be excluded from the outset."<sup>55</sup>

Translation does not take place without loss and change. Anyone who has ever tried to translate a text into his or her own language knows how difficult it is to convey the manifold possibilities of word choice and to communicate the limitations of language that has a specific meaning in one cultural area into a different cultural area. According to translation scholar Fritz Paepcke, "Translation is the communication between two languages at the level of the text."<sup>56</sup> Anyone who translates something needs to appropriate it in the source language and communicate it in the target language. Because translators always contribute something of themselves in a translation, every translation is an interpretation and thus tensions are inevitable. The translation of biblical texts faces particular challenges due to the temporal and cultural differences as well as the long history of exegesis and its impact. Ulrike Bail, one of the editors of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, summarizes this, stating, "Every translation moves in a grey area between text and interpretation, between faithfulness and betrayal, loss and gain, the literal and metaphorical, between the deep ambiguity of the text and the translation decision."<sup>57</sup>

This insight is easily suppressed, particularly in cultural areas in which a definite Bible translation is almost normative. A few harsh reactions to translations that are candid about their criteria, such as the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, show that people are so familiar with some translations that these are regarded as "the original," assumed to be objective, and that changes distort the perceived "purity" of the original.<sup>58</sup> Our experience in working with groups is that the diversity and the coexistence of different translations enables serious discussion of the biblical texts. Such diversity also enriches one's own faith.

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55. Heidemarie Salevsky, "Auf der Suche nach der Wahrheit bei der Bibelübersetzung: Ein Beitrag aus translationswissenschaftlicher Sicht am Beispiel der Hagar-Geschichte (Gen 16; 21; 25)," in Kuhlmann, *DIE BIBEL*, 111.

56. Fritz Paepcke, "Die Sprache im Zusammenleben der Völker," in *Im Übersetzen leben: Übersetzung und Textvergleich* (ed. Klaus Berger and Hans-Michael Speier: Tübingen: Narr, 1986), 22.

57. Ulrike Bail, "Wenn Gott und Mensch zur Sprache kommen...: Überlegungen zu einer Bibel in gerechter Sprache," in Kuhlmann, *DIE BIBEL*, 62.

58. This general misconception is being advanced in Germany by the German Bible Society's publicity campaign for the current Luther revision, among others, under the slogan "The Original." See <http://www.ekd.de/reformationstag/wissenswertes/lutherbibel.html>.



#### 4. THE *BIBEL IN GERECHTER SPRACHE* UNDERSTANDS POLYPHONY AS OPPORTUNITY

The Bible is a library of books that emerged in different contexts over many hundreds of years and were written down by diverse people and groups with differing political concerns. These books were also revised to some extent before being assembled into today's canon. In addition, they were written in different languages—Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek—by people with varying language skills. In the context of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, the individual books of the Bible were translated by different people who tried to choose words that take the features of each biblical book into account. For instance, in his translation of the Revelation of John, Martin Leutzsch points out several places that the language derives from an author whose mother tongue was not Greek, and who therefore made many mistakes in sentence construction. The intentional polyphony of the translations in the Bible in inclusive German corresponds to the polyphony of the books of the Bible.

There has nevertheless been a consensus to select language that is inclusive and that avoids anti-Semitism and the linguistic exclusion of marginalized groups. All those involved were influenced by changes in theological thought in recent decades—Christian-Jewish dialogue, feminist theology, the rediscovery women's significant roles, liberation theology, and also a focus on the poor as historical subjects in the biblical texts. In each of these movements, the Bible has been reread and its importance reiterated for the present. Central to this is the struggle for justice. Some of the trademarks of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* are: as follows the biblical name of God is continually highlighted and a range of reading options offered (Eternal [male/female] One, Adonaj, GOD, Living One [male/female], etc.);<sup>59</sup> women are always explicitly mentioned wherever the intention of the text, the context, or the

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59. Attentiveness to God's name is expressed in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* in a particularly graphic designation: the places in the Old Testament in which God's proper name appears have a grey background and are framed by the Hebrew letters *yod yod*. In between is a reading suggestion, e.g., <sup>7</sup>Adonaj<sup>7</sup>. There is also a header on each double page with further reading suggestions in alternating rows. For the New Testament, the grey background is framed with the Greek letters *kappa* and *sigma*, making it transparent that it is a translation of the Greek *kyrios*, for example <sup>κ</sup>the Eternal One<sup>ς</sup>. This designation is used if the substitute word *kyrios* was selected for God's name in quotations from the Old Testament and in New Testament texts where *kyrios* translated back into the Hebrew would result in God's name. The translators have taken different approaches here. See Jürgen Ebach, "Zur Wiedergabe des Gottesnamens in einer Bibelübersetzung, oder: Welche 'Lösungen' es für ein unlösbares Problem geben könnte," in Kuhlmann, *Die Bibel-Übersetzt in gerechte Sprache*, 150–58; and Christine Gerber et al., *Gott heißt nicht nur Vater: Zur Rede über*

research results of social history demonstrate that they are included in masculine terms; the order of the books of the Old Testament corresponds to the Jewish canon; and references within the canon are recognizable.<sup>60</sup>

## 5. JUSTICE

The Reformation is identified with the biblical terms for justice: *ṣādākā* (Hebrew), and *dikaiosynē* (Greek).<sup>61</sup> God's justice is shown in fundamental acts of salvation and liberation such as the exodus, through which God virtually defines Godself as God (Exod 20:2). The praying women and men of the psalms of lamentation expect salvation through God's action, and even sinners hope for justice (Ps 51:16) that includes forgiveness. The coming messianic age is described as the coming of God's *ṣādākā* (Jer 56:1). God's justice is permanently attached to the Torah: God will speak impartially to those who live as directed by God. The way they behave expresses their relationship to God and their response to God's justice. The name *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* does not claim that this translation is more just or fair than others, only that the attempt is being made to comply with the basic biblical theme of justice in a particular way and, in so doing, actively to turn against biased, unjust, discriminatory, militaristic, and sexist language. This was and is enormously effective—both in Christian theology and in Bible translations.

What is understood in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* by "gerechte Sprache" will be outlined below in a few examples. As will be demonstrated, the "dominant" theological interpretation is challenged in many cases by other translations, and another theology emerges as biblically based.<sup>62</sup> The fact that many perceive this as a threat and react emotionally is hardly surprising.

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*Gott in den Übersetzungen der "Bibel in gerechter Sprache"* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008).

60. See Frank Crüsemann, *Kurzdarstellung*, online: <http://www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de/downloads/hgundandere/kurzdarstellung.pdf>.

61. See Frank Crüsemann and Luise Schottroff, "Gerechtigkeit," glossary article in *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (ed. Ulrike Bail et al.; Gütersloh, Gütersloher, 2006), 2347–49.

62. The examples refer to the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* because the authors are well versed in relation to this translation. The translation decisions in the other listed and unlisted translations likewise convey insights that confound theological constructions and are opposed (sometimes vehemently) for this reason.

### 5.1. THE CRITERION OF DOING JUSTICE TO THE TEXT

*The Bibel in gerechter Sprache* should and will do justice primarily to the particular source text. It is a translation in its own right from the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. All translations are based on an intensive scholarly engagement with the source text. Therefore, widely differing translation solutions were found in order to do justice to particular texts and their language. *The Bibel in gerechter Sprache* dispenses with additional interpretive subheadings. The glossary gives an account of the basic understanding and the translation options of all key biblical terms, thus allowing for discoveries that are otherwise only possible for people who have learned the ancient languages.

### 5.2. THE CRITERION OF GENDER EQUALITY

*Gerechte Sprache* is a specialized term that has been in use in Germany since the 1980s as a rendering of the term “inclusive language” used in North America. Can a language be “just” or “unjust”? What criteria are there for this?<sup>63</sup> To answer these questions, Helga Kuhlmann, a systematic theologian who was part of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* editorial group, examined the act of speaking in itself:

Relational structures between individuals, between groups, families, social environments, classes and larger institutions are reflected in the linguistic communication of these groups and maintain them at the same time by the speech patterns, the grammar and the linguistically explicit hierarchies. The structures of the gender ratio ... are also shown in the language and constantly reproduced by language or procedurally changed.<sup>64</sup>

Since the 1980s, feminist linguists such as Luise Pusch and Senta Trömel-Plötz have pointed out that androcentric language with masculine forms has a particular dominance in everyday German usage.<sup>65</sup> Since women now occupy important offices, changes have been made for the better. For instance, masculine terms are less commonly used to address women. In many churches there are now women priests, deacons, and even bishops.

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63. See Helga Kuhlmann, “In welcher Weise kann die Sprache einer Bibelübersetzung ‘gerecht’ sein,” in Kuhlmann, *DIE BIBEL*, 77–98, here 77–78.

64. *Ibid.*, 77.

65. Luise F. Pusch, *Das Deutsche als Männersprache* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984); Senta Trömel-Plötz, ed., *Gewalt durch Sprache: Die Vergewaltigung von Frauen in Gesprächen* (Frankfurt: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1984).

Finally, the election of a female German chancellor has challenged people to think about language use.

The Bible comes from a patriarchal world, and often speaks grammatically in masculine terms of “sons of Israel” and of “male disciples.” Feminist social historical analyses have shown that women were involved in the events and experiences of biblical times.<sup>66</sup> Then, as now, androcentric texts refer to women. This fact shapes the translation of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*. Thus, a two-stage procedure was developed for the translations:

1. A question was raised with regard to social history: Did women in antiquity have this profession and did women carry out these activities?
2. It was asked what evidence there is that they were referred to in the text to be translated.

The reasons for this procedure are clear in an example from Mark 15:40–41. Here Mark’s Gospel still only mentions women because the men were no longer present. It states: “They had followed Jesus in Galilee ... and many other women, who had gone with him to Jerusalem.” This sentence assumes that women were among those who had followed Jesus from Galilee, and the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* therefore translates *mathētai* from Mark 1 onward as female and male followers.

Were there actually women shepherds, fisherwomen, women prophets, women Pharisees, or women disciples? These questions were raised many times after the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* appeared, and they provided the opportunity to present to an interested wider public the results of over thirty years of feminist and social-historical research on the Bible. Criticisms of many translation decisions make clear that the corresponding research results are relatively unknown, and that it is possible in many cases to teach and to study at theological faculties without learning about such research. This concern about gender-fair language causes us to ask further questions regarding the context and roles of women in first-century Judaism.

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66. On this, see also Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983); Luise Schottroff, *Lydias ungeduldige Schwestern: Feministische Sozialgeschichte des frühen Christentums* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1994); Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, ed., *A Feminist Commentary* (vol. 2 of *Searching the Scriptures*; New York: Crossroad, 1994); Ute E. Eisen, *Amtsträgerinnen im frühen Christentum: Epigraphische und literarische Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996); Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds. *Kompendium Feministische Bibelauslegung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 1998).

## 5.3. THE CRITERION OF JEWISH-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* is a Christian translation that attempts to learn from Jewish-Christian dialogue. In recent decades it has been widely recognized how much the New Testament that emerged from a Jewish base has been read and translated in an anti-Semitic manner.<sup>67</sup> The so-called “antitheses” of the Sermon on the Mount are one example, in which the translation “but I say to you” must not be understood in the sense of Jesus’ turning against the Jewish tradition.<sup>68</sup> In the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, Matt 5:21–22 reads: “You have heard that God said to earlier generations: thou shalt not kill...” *I interpret this for you today as...*” The Hebrew or Aramaic words corresponding to the Greek *egō de legō hymin* (in Matt 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44) introduce, as they did among other rabbis in Jesus’ time, a biblical interpretation that differs from that of other scholars (e.g., *Bereshit Rabbah* 55:3). More recent research has emphasized this.<sup>69</sup> Jesus’ interpretation of scripture in Matthew’s Sermon on the Mount (5:21–48) should not be understood as a fundamental disagreement with the Torah, as the headline “antitheses” suggests. It is instead Jesus’ contemporary interpretation of the Torah, intended to apply the will of God to the society of the time.

The emphasis on Jesus’ Jewishness in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* was the subject of emotional discussions after it appeared. Some accused it of a “Judaization of Christianity,”<sup>70</sup> while others emphasized that what it meant had become clear to them for the first time—Jesus, Mary, Paul and many of the other followers were and remained Jews. The recognition of Christianity’s being deeply rooted in Judaism is of great significance, particularly for inter-religious discussions.

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67. See also Leonore Siegele-Wenschkewitz, *Verdrängte Vergangenheit, die uns bedrängt: Feministische Theologie in der Verantwortung für die Geschichte* (Munich: Kaiser, 1988); Judith Plaskow, “Anti-Judaism in Feminist Christian Interpretation,” in *A Feminist Introduction* (vol. 1 of *Searching the Scriptures*; ed. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza; New York: Crossroad, 1993), 117–29; Luise Schottroff and Marie-Theres Wacker, eds., *Von der Wurzel getragen: Christlich-feministische Exegese in Auseinandersetzung mit Antijudaismus* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Dagmar Henze et al., *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament? Grundlagen für die Arbeit mit biblischen Texten* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1997).

68. See Luise Schottroff, “Votum zur Bibel in gerechter Sprache in Zürich 9.11.2006” (<http://www.bibel-in-gerechter-sprache.de/downloads/schottroffzuerich.pdf>).

69. See Martin Vahrenhorst, “Ihr sollt überhaupt nicht schwören”: *Matthäus im halachischen Diskurs* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2002), 218–34; Peter Fiedler, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (THKNT 1; Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006), 122–58.

70. Johan Schloeman, “Und die Weisheit wurde Materie,” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (23–24 December 2006).

## 5.4. THE CRITERION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Liberation theology, feminist kyriarchal critique, postcolonial studies and the discussion of empire have shown that biblical texts and their exegetical history are also determined by power structures. They allude to the close association of androcentrism, colonialism, racism, militarism with other relationships of exploitation. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza stated this in programmatic terms in 1983:

Historical interpretation is defined by contemporary questions and horizons of reality and conditioned by contemporary political interests and structures of domination. Historical “objectivity” can only be approached by reflecting critically on naming one’s theoretical presuppositions and political allegiances.<sup>71</sup>

Translating biblical texts into the contemporary German language context means seeking language that is appropriate to the history of Western Christianity. The New Testament uses many words that were used in the language of the Roman imperial ideology and propaganda.<sup>72</sup> For example: *euangelium* means “God’s good news” as well as the good news of the emperor’s birth; *parousia*, “advent of Christ,” also meant the arrival of the emperor for a visitation rewarding the allegiance of a dominion or a city. The term *kyrios*, “Lord,” or “Lord of the world,” referred to God’s authority as well as to the global dominance of Rome.<sup>73</sup> In the Jewish tradition of the first century C.E. when the New Testament was emerging, this language was language critical of authority. It communicated that believers listened to this lord and no other. The words contradicted the claim to power of political and social rulers, and were also understood by them in this way. These words and images were subsequently changed into authoritarian language, now itself legitimizing the language of an ideology, authority, and power. Images of dependence, obedience, and submission are therefore associated with the word “lord” in a democratic cultural sphere. Many words of the Bible have become unusable, as long as contem-

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71. Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her*, xvii. She describes hereafter how the androcentric perspective influences Bible translations and interpretations; see further 43–48.

72. See below Luise Schottroff and Claudia Janssen, “Übersetzungsfragen zu Herrschaft und Sklaverei,” in Kuhlmann, *DIE BIBEL*, 212–21.

73. See Adolf Deissmann, *Licht vom Osten: Das neue Testament und die neuentdeckten Texte der hellenistisch-römischen Welt* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1909), 184–298.

porary biblical interpretation does not help to develop awareness of their critique of hegemony and life force.

The following examples from Matt 11:5 and Luke 7:22 demonstrate what it means to understand social justice as a major criterion of translation. The presupposition that poor people are primarily objects of the New Testament message and not subjects of its proclamation has in many cases defined the exegesis of these texts and their translation. Thus the conventional translation reads: “the gospel is preached to the poor.” In the Greek this is *ptōchoi euangelizontai*. Traditionally, this form of the verb “to proclaim” is interpreted as passive voice here, but it is in the middle voice, in the *genus verbi*, which in its meaning is between active and passive voice and is usually understood in the active: to proclaim the gospel.<sup>74</sup> This active meaning of the middle voice is also present in Jer 61:1 (LXX), a verse that is quoted in Luke 4:18: God’s messenger proclaims the good news to the poor (dative: *ptōchois*). Luke 7:22 and Matt 11:5 also pick up Jer 61:1 but change the syntax. Now the poor (*ptōchoi*) are in the nominative: the poor proclaim the gospel; they turn into subjects of the proclamation. The literary context in Matt 11:5 and Luke 7:22 reinforces this version, since a series of subjects (in the nominative) are listed here that become active in relation to Jesus: the blind, the lame, and the deaf. This parallelism is broken up in the conventional interpretation if the verb is interpreted as passive voice, turning the subjects into objects. The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* translates in terms that do justice to the text: “The blind see, the lame walk, the lepers become clean and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised and the poor bring the good news.”

##### 5.5. BIBLICAL CHRISTOLOGY IN INCLUSIVE GERMAN

The translation of the word *kyrios*, when it relates to Jesus, is a particular challenge. How can its meaning as critical of authority be rendered in a language that has been using it for centuries to legitimize authority? The translations in *The Bibel in gerechter Sprache* do not offer any standard solution. Some consciously avoid the word “Herr” and paraphrase in order to express the meaning of the term *kyrios*. In order to express the nature of belonging to Jesus as *kyrios*, the word is rendered many times with “(to) whom we belong.” Other

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74. See Walter Bauer, *Griechisch-deutsches Wörterbuch zu den Schriften des Neuen Testaments und der frühchristlichen Literatur* (6th ed.; ed. Kurt and Barbara Aland; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1988), 643. In addition to Matt 11:5 and Luke 7:22, he refers solely to one other place in the New Testament where the verb is of passive significance: Heb 4:2, 6. Here the statement is expressed by using a participle.

solutions are: “Jesus, the Christ, in whose power we trust,” “in whose protective power we have entrusted ourselves,” or “liberator.”

In the translation of the letter to the church in Rome, Claudia Janssen has usually rendered *kyrios*, when it relates to Jesus or the Messiah, with “to whom we belong.” The concern behind this is to make the Christology of Paul accessible to a contemporary understanding.<sup>75</sup> This translation reflects a Christology of relationship based on reciprocity, not on authoritarian power. The Messiah represents the hope of an entire people and their suffering in the present. “Christ,” however, is no longer the christological “title of sovereignty” in the sense of the 1960s.<sup>76</sup> The title “son” or “child of God” (e.g., Rom 8:16, 17) does not separate Jesus from other people as unique, because they, too, are called the daughters and sons of God.<sup>77</sup>

Paul has summarized this Christology: “the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29). Christology in this sense means finding encouragement, empowerment, and comfort in a relationship with God, the Messiah, and in fellowship with other people who see themselves as brothers and sisters. The translations of the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* are based here on the drafts of women theologians who have been describing Christology since the 1980s under the category of relationship and its perpetuation.<sup>78</sup>

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75. On the Christology in 1 and 2 Corinthians, see Luise Schottroff, “‘... Damit im Namen Jesus sich jedes Knie beuge’: Christologie in 1 Kor und in Phil 2:9–11,” in *Christus und seine Geschwister: Christologie im Umfeld der Bibel in gerechter Sprache* (ed. Marlene Crüsemann and Carsten Jochum-Bortfeld; Gütersloh: Gütersloher, 2009), 81–94; and Marlene Crüsemann, “Trost, Charis und Kraft der Schwachen: Eine Christologie der Beziehung nach dem zweiten Brief an die Gemeinde in Korinth,” in Crüsemann and Jochum-Bortfeld, *Christus und seine Geschwister*, 111–37.

76. See Ferdinand Hahn, *Christologische Hoheitstitel: Ihre Geschichte im frühen Christentum* (5th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1995).

77. See Claudia Janssen, “Christus und seine Geschwister (Röm 8,12–17.29f),” in Crüsemann and Jochum-Bortfeld, *Christus und seine Geschwister*, 64–80.

78. See also Carter Heyward, *Und sie rührte sein Kleid an: Eine feministische Theologie der Beziehung* (Stuttgart: Kreuz, 1986); Doris Strahm and Regula Strobel, eds., *Vom Verlangen nach Heilwerden: Christologie in feministisch-theologischer Sicht* (Fribourg: Edition Exodus, 1991); Renate Jost and Eveline Valtink, eds., *Ihr aber für wen haltet ihr mich? Auf dem Weg zu einer feministisch-befreiungstheologischen Revision von Christologie* (Gütersloh: Kaiser, 1996). See, however, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Jesus: Miriam’s Child, Sophia’s Prophet: Critical Issues in Feminist Christology* (New York: Continuum, 1994).



## 6. THERE IS LIFE ON THE ROAD TO JUSTICE

Bible translations in “gerechte Sprache,” or inclusive language, are widely received and at the same time continue to be developed. They are already shaping the spirituality of many women and men today who are encouraged to advocate greater justice in their communities and churches as well as in local social projects.