Reading John 1:1-18 in Sesotho: An Investigation of the Issues, Meanings and Interpretations Raised by Mother Tongue Exegesis

by

Maarman Samuel TSHEHLA

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Dedication

To the people of Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana. You have scarred my life in the manner so edifying as only you could.

Psalm 33:6

Awurade de n'asɛm na ɛyɛɛ ɔsoro,
na ɔde n'anom honhom yɛɛ emu asafo nyinaa (Akwapem Twi)

By the Word of Yahweh the Heavens were made,
by the Breath of His mouth all their array (NJB).

Mahodimo a entswe ka Lentswe la Jehova,
le makgotla wohle a wona ke pudulo ya molomo wa hae (Southern Sotho)

Magodimo a dirilwe ka Lentšu la Morena;
makoko kamoka a ona a dirilwe ka moya wa molomo wagwe (Northern Sotho)

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Abbreviations

ACMC	*Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre* for Mission Research and Applied Theology
AICs	*African Independent Churches*
ATF	the *African Theological Fellowship*
ATR	*Anglican Theological Review*
BFBS	the *British and Foreign Bible Society*
BSSA	the *Bible Society of South Africa*
cf	*compare with*
contra	*against* or *as opposed to*
CUP	*Cambridge University Press*
ed	*editor* (or '*edited*' when followed by '*by*')
EDP	*Electronic Data Processing*
EUP	*Edinburgh University Press*
HSRC	*Human Sciences Research Council* (RSA)
idem	*same author*
JACT	*Journal of African Christian Thought*
JSNT	*Journal for the Study of the New Testament*
JTSA	*Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*
KJV	the *King James Version* (or the *Authorized Version*) of the Bible
LXX	the *Septuagint* (the Greek Old Testament)
MSS	*Manuscripts*
n.	(*Foot*)-*note*
NIV	the *New International Version* of the Bible
NJB	the *New Jerusalem Bible*
NT	the *New Testament* (of the Christian Bible)
OT	the *Old Testament* (of the Christian Bible, also called the *Hebrew Bible*)
OUP	*Oxford University Press*
PANSALB	the *Pan South African Language Board*
rev	*revised*
RSA	the *Republic of South Africa*
RSV	the *Revised Standard Version* of the Bible
SABC	the *South African Broadcasting Corporation*
SCM	the *Student Christian Movement*
sic	*cited as is* to be found in the original manuscript
SNTS	*Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas*
SPCK	the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*
SSA	*Statistics South Africa* (formerly CSS - *Central Statistical Services*)
SUP	*Stanford University Press*
tr	*translated*
UBS	*United Bible Societies*
UCT	the *University of Cape Town*
UNIN	the *University of the North*
UNISA	the *University of South Africa*
UNP	the *University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg* Campus
USA	the *United Sates of America*
v & vv.	*verse* & *verses* respectively

Abstract

By focussing on literary translation dynamics, and on how the current vernacular Bibles (specifically John 1:1-18 in Southern and Northern Sotho) encourage certain and not other understandings of the Bible (popular theology), this project attempts to achieve three related goals: (a) to reintegrate me as a Mosotho Biblical Studies student into the world and discourse of my people, (b) to bridge the gulf between the world of the Basotho believers and the academic world which has produced copious resources for the study of the Bible, and (c) to explore the implications of, or to assess the value of, the availability of the Bible in the vernacular for the Church and the academy in South Africa. The first goal is rather subjective and difficult to quantify. The second is critical in a complex plural society like South Africa. The third cannot be dealt with conclusively, perhaps the use of this project lies in pointing out various possibilities in this arena. The overarching bias (hypothesis) is that conscious critical work with the Bible in the vernacular is enriching in more ways than one.

Chapter 1

THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY: MY PREMISE

The dilemma of most of Africa since the 1960's: on the one hand the reality of language needs (such as the need for a 'language of national unity') that are met by English, and on the other hand, the need to free the majority of inhabitants from the languages that were part of earlier imperialist political systems by developing African languages (Maartens 1998:33).

1.1 The African Dilemma

1.1.1 *The Need for Self-assertion*

The ensuing study, as the above extract reveals, is cast against a backdrop of predicaments. Africa's present experience is defined by past experiences to the same degree that, I hope, it is also defined by the aspirations of Africans as people of hope.[1] That past is not entirely pleasant to reminisce about, and divergent accounts of how it was are not helping the healing processes either. Current options are no less enigmatic, particularly when seen in terms of what they might mean several years from now. Post-colonial Africa is a world of freedom within critical constraints.

How do we make significant headway without alienating our neighbours? Some form of contribution towards the resolution of this concern is intended, albeit within the limited scope of Biblical Studies. But even in this limited scope we are beset with predicaments. At one point we use indigenous 'tools' and at another we feel compelled to label these tools as 'pre-critical', 'uncritical', 'primitive', or 'creative' *et cetera* in comparison to conventional (Western) modes of operation in the academy. The rules of engagement, it appears, are fixed and Africans must comply if they wish to be heard.

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[1] Tinyiko Maluleke (1996:8) oozes this hopeful confidence when he asserts: "While oppression and imperialism have been real and ruthless, Africans have at a deeper level negotiated and survived the scourge - by relativising it, resisting it, and modifying it with uncanny creativity"

So our attempts at self-assertion (African Renaissance, Development, Reconstruction, Empowerment *et cetera*), informed partly by our past experiences and partly by our visions of a desirable future, are checked by extraneous but unavoidable forces[2] such as 'the need for a language of national unity' or the noble desire not to promote provincialism or imperialism.[3] A Willowbank participant, Kwame Bediako has elsewhere[4] defined African Theology as a contextual struggle towards African Christians' self-definition and self-understanding.[5] Trying hard not to succumb to any form of extremism, and caught between indigenous and global interests,[6] African theologians sought to assert that there is in Africa's 'old' much that is good and that must dialogue with Africa's 'new.'

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[2] After much contemplation I have accepted that these global issues cannot be wished away. But an African observer often feels like a person from Nazareth must have felt in the company of authentic Israelites such as Nathanael (John 1:43-50). The rules of the game and the turf where it is played were controlled by the Judaeans, and the Galileans had either to play along or be ignored. Despite Africa's long history of mixed fortunes, the prejudice evident in the question: 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?' is constantly asserted in various ways. All that Africa begets in any discipline has to be weighed by the world, including Africans, against non-African standards. Matters, I am convinced, are such that Africans feel obliged to ask themselves: 'Can anything good come from Africa?' or more pertinently, 'Can anything good come from working with the Bible in African Languages in the academy?' It is the latter question that this project seeks to answer in the affirmative.

[3] "We have emphasized that the church must be allowed to indigenize itself, and to 'celebrate, sing and dance' the gospel in its own cultural medium. At the same time, we wish to be alert to the dangers of this process....Thus we should seek with equal care to avoid theological imperialism or theological provincialism. A church's theology should be developed by the community of faith out of the Scripture in interaction with other theologies of the past and present, and with the local culture and its needs" (*The Willowbank Report* 1978:26-28). This document is also accessible in John Stott (ed) 1996 *Making Christ Known*.

[4] "At the heart of the new African theological method was the issue of identity, which itself came to be perceived as a theological category, and which therefore entailed confronting constantly the question as to how and how far the 'old' and the 'new' in African religious consciousness could become integrated into a unified vision of what it meant to be African *and* Christian" (Bediako 1997:430; cf. *idem* 1992 & 1995).

[5] Samuel Escobar (1992:82), speaking about churches in the southern hemisphere, declares: "In some cases, theology has accompanied the effort of these churches to find their own identity, away from colonialist traps linked to their origin. Indigenous theology is much more than an adolescent rebellion or a curiosity for academics interested in exotic things. It has to do with the life of the Church and her faithfulness to the Lord." (Indigenous theologies like African Theology must not be confused with 'popular theologies' which are indigenous but not based in the academy.)

[6] "The burden and veritable incubus of which Bediako [1995] speaks is the nagging doubt about Christianity's ability to offer a 'credible basis and satisfactory intellectual framework for African life' on the one hand, and the problem of 'an Africa uncertain of its identity, poised between the impact of the West and the pull of its indigenous tradition,' on the other" (Maluleke 1996:6).

It is Africa's turn to lead the world, at least theologically.[7] Our self-assertion seems called for, if not overdue. But how do we go about containing the 'new' ('the foreign', 'the global', 'the non-African') without losing ourselves in the process? 'Contain' is preferred because it seems inclined in favour of *the preservation of the container's identity.*

1.1.2 *The Manner of our Self-assertion*

How do we promote *the indigenous* in its own eyes as well as in the eyes of *the (encroaching and powerful) alien*? Two assumptions are implicit here: (a) the foreign is good but the indigenous needs affirming and/or resuscitating in order to compete on equal footing, and (b) the African person cannot afford to disregard *either* of these 'worlds.'

First, and this point has been dealt with since the dawn of African Theology at least, Africans must revisit and reclaim their own cultural tools (and values) of engagement. The soil has been tilled and gatherers must set in to collect the necessary tools and discourses.[8]

Secondly, Africans need to know how to employ the desirable foreign tools of engagement. What is required here is the rehabilitation of the African person. Mechanisms must be put in place that will boost his/her self-esteem; the result has to be nothing less than the translation of Africans from shy

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[7] Andrew F Walls is one of those missiologists who have proclaimed the southward movement of Christianity, with Africa being one of the significant 'players' (see 1989 and 2000 articles among others).

[8] Names of African women and men abound in this connection. My wish is for all these (biblical) scholars to do more exegetical than merely thematic studies using African idioms.

inquirers (Can anything good come out of Africa?) to people who take pride in what the Creator has been and is continuing to accomplish through Africans in the world. The foreign is not, by definition, better in quality than the indigenous!

The third and last point I wish to note here relates to the languages we deploy to carry meanings across. Indigenous languages as media of the tools and values of engagement must be accorded due respect. Languages are not innocent transmitters, in fact they restrict as much as they promote discourse (see any credible study on language e.g. Wallwork 1978; Holmes 1992; Hudson 1996). It is awkward but not unusual to have several languages staring at the reader of a text, and we all learn to domesticate these and even put them to use ourselves. For instance, although I have not formally studied Latin, I am at home with several Latin phrases. The same is true for even fewer German concepts.

1.2 The Study's Agenda

1.2.1 *What I Hope this Study will Achieve*

There are several objectives that I set forth to achieve in the present study. I hope to continue the African agenda of self-assertion in a manner that places Africa on the global stage in Africa's own *idiom*. Since the rules of engagement are already set in non-African idiom, I could not proceed on Africa's own *terms*. It seems advisable to begin with the African idiom and hope that the terms will accrue by building thereon.

The overarching presupposition of the study is that the aboriginal and the extraneous can and must mutually coexist. The basic proviso is that neither is necessarily superior or inferior to the other. It appears legitimate then to *affirm critical engagement with the Bible in people's own mother tongues in the academy*. This must be done without pretending to call for the abolition of current practice (cf. *Afrikania* as presented in Bediako 1995:17-38).

Another goal of this study complements the preceding but arises from personal experience. There is a seeming incongruity between my academic training and my cultural experience (Sesotho). Sesotho on the one hand, is communal and esteems sharing and resourcefulness among all members in the common struggle for survival. Theological training, on the other, is geared towards equipping me for service, *inter alia* if not primarily, to my own people. The apparent inability to engender a fruitful dialogue between my experience as a Mosotho and my theological training is thus unsettling.[9]

Hopefully I am not "already clearly a victim of cultural conquest" (Saunders 1979:128). Perhaps mine is only the "schizoid character of a life" in which both the Sesotho and theological worlds are valid and yet unrelated (Setiloane 1976:2-3). I do not find cause to enumerate the schizoid character of this life. Let me only note that this is the struggle I share with most Africans since the arrival of Christian missions on the continent. I have thus embarked on this project with the hope of reclaiming something of the richness of Sesotho while seriously bringing to bear all the tools I have acquired in my theological training so far. This should explain the autobiographical slant of this work.

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[9] J A Draper (in *"Less Literate are Safer"*...) calls this phenomenon "the 'apostasy' of the trained black readers of the Bible."

If this project succeeds in its intentions, a further benefit will accrue: Biblical Studies as a discipline will become less apostatizing for 'Black readers of the Bible.'[10] Once demonstrated, the methodology proposed in this study will further ground Biblical Studies in Africa's multi-faceted existence.

1.2.2 *My Point of Departure*

I am fascinated by the role the Bible is playing in Africa today. In its various mother tongue versions, the Bible is undeniably one of the most significant literary corpuses in Africa's heritage. But the Bible is a written text, and Africa is a significantly oral world. Whereas the written text of the Bible derived from the oral proclaimed message of the gospel, today the proclaimed gospel is bridled by the written text of the Bible. This is acute particularly because speaking and writing skills are neither similar nor similarly acquired, granting overlaps in places. Bible translations are thus compelled to endeavour to simultaneously cater for the needs of hearers and readers, of public and private reading. According to Stanley Porter (1999:23-24) practically every Bible translation claims this as its goal. So it should be no discomfort for us in this study to presume (biblical) literacy within a largely oral context.[11]

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[10] "It would appear, then, that the impact of literacy education as a socialization agent on individuals' cultural identity can be either destructive or constructive. When the person loses the capability to derive and create meaning in a culturally significant way, he or she becomes less, not more, literate. To the extent that successful learning, as defined from the school's point of view, forces the ethnic minority child to become disconnected from what is personally significant, his or her ability to construct a positive and coherent cultural identity will be weakened" (Ferdman 1990:199; cf. Moto 1986).

[11] Both my parents are illiterate, yet they have come to acquire *biblical literacy*. This can be explained, I think, by combining the work of the Spirit in the proclaimed Word and my parents' efforts at patiently reading syllable per syllable until each word and phrase sounds familiar. This is the specific sense in which I employ 'biblical literacy': a partnership between the oral and the written that affords non-literate people access to the Bible. A documented example is that of Isaiah Shembe in his defense at the commission of 1931, "No, I have not been taught to read and write, but I am able to read the Bible a little, and that came to me by revelation and not by learning. It came to me by

Here too we are constrained by the needs of both the oral and the literary worlds; none of them is necessarily superior or inferior to the other. I see *biblical literacy* as a middle ground between these two worlds. By means of it, non-literate people can read the Bible in an oral mode. It allows the unschooled to enjoy the privileges of the schooled without threatening their existing modes of operation. This phenomenon parallels what other observers have labeled *bricolage* - the ability of subordinate groups to coopt foreign (dominant) tools thereby pleasing the powerful of society.[12] But once in the grasp of the *bricoleurs*, these tools are employed to the subordinate groups' own advantage. James C Scott (1990) has convincingly shown how social appearances are, more often than not, very deceptive. He also eloquently demonstrates that all castes, and not just the dominated, are engaged in this misleading behaviour. Pre- and post-1994 South African readings of the Bible by various sectors of society are ample illustrations of this principle.

In this light, my classroom literacy and attendant 'systematic' or 'critical' procedures are ambivalent. On the one hand they alienate me from the popular discourse of my (largely) oral people. On the other hand, if I am a shrewd *bricoleur*, they can be used (as this study is intended) to serve the needs and interests of my people. Rather than forcing, say, Sesotho-speaking students to develop their Biblical Studies skills in a 'language' that they may or may not require in the field, it seems more profitable to inculcate a fruitful coexistence of both (or more) languages from the start. Biblical Studies as a discipline stands to benefit from encouraging its students to engender during their formation (a)

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miracle" (cited in Gunner 1986:187).

[12] Among others Jean and John Comaroff (1991), Terence Ranger (1983), Marilyn J. Legge (1992), and James P Gee (1996), drawing from Claude Levi-Strauss (1966, *The Savage Mind*, Chicago). "Unlike modern engineers, bricoleurs do not design tools for the specific task at hand; rather their universe of instruments is closed and the rules of the game are always to make do with whatever is at hand" (Gee 1996:48).

fluency or competency in their mother tongue, (b) competence in the biblical languages (Greek, Hebrew, *et al*), and (c) English (or other pertinent language) speaking and writing skills.

This approach should have the value of grounding Biblical Studies in the living contexts out of which its students come while circulating fresh insights and perspectives from world-views that might be closer to that of the Bible than world-views based on modernity's presuppositions. In addition to Biblical Studies, students will develop more holistically if their training consciously appreciates their cultural milieux and idioms. Tolerance of and patience with diversity and difference will be acquired, while all students will feel affirmed by the opportunity to contribute from their unique cultural contexts in their unique cultural idioms. This is in keeping with the reality that our classrooms are multicultural and multilingual. This project seeks to demonstrate the feasibility of this context-sensitive methodology from the perspective of Bible translation.

1.3 On Bible Translators

1.3.1 *The Convictions*

It seems indisputable that Bible translators are genuinely convinced of the Bible's ability to speak for itself. In fact the Protestant rationale for translating the Scriptures into various mother tongues is based on the conviction that access to the Scriptures is often a sufficient basis for accession to 'salvation.' Testimonies abound of people who were converted in their own homes with only the Bible speaking to them, so to speak. The respect shown to the Bible certainly (or ideally) precluded attempts on the part of these translators to wilfully interfere with the contents.

The same degree of respect is extended, it appears, to the indigenous languages as well. Lamin Sanneh is one of the modern defenders of this truism. Speaking of the initial modern encounter between missionaries and Africa, he states:

> It is clear that missionary translators saw a natural congruence between indigenous cultures and the gospel, with the diversity and plurality of those cultures justifying commitment to the particularity and specificity of cultural materials. Not only individual languages, but also minute dialectical differences were noted and preserved in translations....The missionary view was that all languages may be regarded as complete autonomous systems, and that purer forms of the language, however puzzling and unfamiliar, served best the purposes of translation. So linguistic investigations were mounted to erect as authentic an indigenous system through which God might be mediated with all the nuances and specificity of cultural originality (1992:17-18).

So we must receive the efforts of translators in good faith. But we must also remember that, wittingly and/or unwittingly, (a) translators are also reservoirs of traditions and ideologies, and (b) their understanding and mastery of various languages is also a variable since outsiders can only know so much and no more. We must heed the following caution: "Whenever the translation is approached in a theoretical manner, a type of perfectly competent translator, who does not exist in reality, is presupposed" (Whang 1999:48). This realization coerces the need to understand the processes and precautions taken by translators in order to minimize unintended violence upon the texts involved.

In this work 'translating' refers to *the process* while 'translation(s)' denotes *the end-product(s)*. But 'translation' also refers to *the theory* behind the exercise, as encountered in some of the citations. The preceding cue is taken from Roger T Bell (1991:13). The present study's sole interest is *literary translation* i.e. the use of written material to transfer meanings from one culture to the next, although in places we mention other types of translation.

1.3.2 *The Practice*

It is my, perhaps naive, assumption that translating in Africa has thus far been the domain of 'foreign' expertise. Even where indigenous folk are involved, the supervision and guiding principles are not necessarily local.

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   ↔    ↔   ┌────────────────────────────────────────────┐
                │  Greek Mss    ↔      ↔     Religious Tradition │
 ↕              └────────────────────────────────────────────┘
                              ↕(i)
 ↕
                        ┌──────────────────┐
 ↕(v)                   │   Translators    │
                        └──────────────────┘
 ↕                           ⇓(ii)  ↑?(iv)

 ↔    ↔    ↔    ┌──────────────────────────────┐
                  │      Sesotho Bible Text      │
                  │       ↕    (iii)    ↕        │
                  │  Mosotho Reader  ↔  Sermons  │
                  └──────────────────────────────┘
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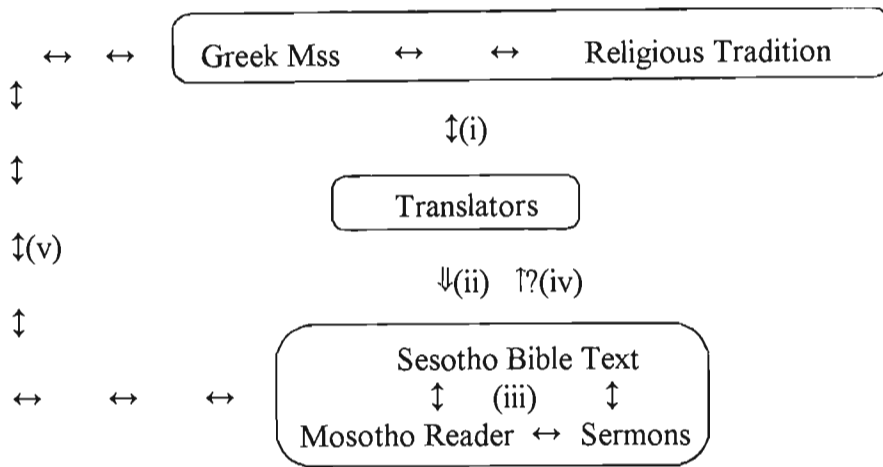
Figure 1. Tradition and Translation

Figure 1 summarizes my thoughts in the context of the New Testament: (i) Our convictions and knowledge inform our reading of the Greek mss, and this is the baggage we bring to the task of translating; (ii) Translators themselves as unique persons are a factor in the process, in addition to the Greek mss and tradition; (iii) There exists a cyclical relationship (mutual and critical composition of one by the other) between the Sesotho *text* (the translation), the Mosotho *reader*, and the Sesotho

tradition based on the reading of the Sesotho text in the existential context of the Basotho;[13] (iv) It

is doubtful whether this cyclical relationship has any influence on subsequent translations, i.e. I am

not sure that Bible translators immerse themselves in understandings of the Bible based on current

vernacular translations as much as they heed historical traditions; (v) Acquisition of biblical language

skills by the indigenous reader adds other possibilities to this process.

It is these possibilities that this study explores. I am a Mosotho reader of the Sesotho text, with

access to (a) the Greek (and Hebrew) texts of the Bible and to interpretative traditions based on these

texts, (b) the Christian and religious world of the Basotho, (c) tradition based on the Sesotho text in

question, and (d) scholarly debates around the text in question.

My awareness of all these factors, and my conscious commitment to them all, promise to raise aspects

of the Sesotho Bible that might up to now not have been raised. It is all these that I hope to illustrate,

with restricted reference to John 1:1-18. But before I justify my selection of John 1:1-18, let me say

more about the people with whom I identify myself.

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[13] I add the definite article to 'Basotho' as a compromise stance. For most modern Basotho, the natural reading would be without the article; the human class prefix (Ba-) takes care of the need for the article. But the learned friends of Basotho are used to 'the Sotho', 'the English', etc. I hope then that the awkward 'the Basotho' is tolerable.

1.4 The Basotho of Southern Africa

> Divisions such as language, culture and ethnicity often converge to form specific population groups, but even so, group boundaries remain relative (HSRC 1995:20)

The Basotho are one of several cultural-linguistic groups of southern Africa, belonging to the broad category known as *Bantu*.[14] According to Peter Magubane's very useful *Vanishing Cultures of South Africa*, 90% of South Africa's Bantu peoples are divided into two large language groups - the Nguni and the Sotho-Tswana; the other 10% is shared by the Vhavenda and the Vatsonga (1998:10). The Nguni comprise amaZulu, amaXhosa, emaSwati, and amaNdebele. The Sotho-Tswana are divided into the Bapedi (Northern Sotho), the Bashweshwe (Southern Sotho), and the Batswana (Western Sotho).[15] Add Afrikaans and English and you have the eleven official languages of South Africa.

The official language policy has the unfortunate drawback that it gives the false impression that other than 'Whites', everybody else in South Africa is Bantu. A more complete picture has to account for

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[14] "More than one-third of the most widely used languages in Africa are Bantu languages." The Bantu are a sub-group of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Kordofanian family; the *three* other families are Khoisan, Afroasiatic, and Nilo-Saharan. (*Grolier Academic Encyclopedia* 1995, vol. 1, p. 161; cf. West 1976:7). Ironic, and enlightening, that 'Bantu' which means 'people' should be used as a category to refer to *some* people.

[15] N J van Warmelo says, and I concur, that the division of the Sotho-Tswana into three is "an oversimplification" (1974:72; cf. Johnston 1922:81-88). For one thing, such broad categorizations do not begin to hint at the diversity and similarity that simultaneously obtain within and across these groups. Let me illustrate this with reference to the Bapedi: "The Northern Sotho are linguistically and culturally the most diverse of all the Sotho-Tswana groups, today comprising some 136 separate chiefdoms, including the little-studied Ntwana" (Magubane 1998:11). I had never heard of such a people as the Ntwana until I read Magubane, and yet I am a Mopedi.
The situation is so serious that van Warmelo can claim that "the North Sotho language is a fiction." (1974:76). In fact, the Balovedu are at present trying to get their language recognized by PANSALB and the government, as it is so different from the Northern Sotho taught in schools. This linguistic and cultural diversity results from the amalgamation of historically once-disparate though etiologically-related clusters of people (see *inter alia* van Warmelo 1952). But since there is little consensus on how these historical processes evolved, and since they bear no critical relevance for the present, we shall leave the matter here.

the South African *Coloureds, Indians (Asians)*, and the *Khoisan* (even those Whites who speak Greek, Portuguese, French, etc.). A promising recent development, in the spirit of our country's constitution,[16] was the launch on 07 August 2000 of a community radio station in the Northern Cape Province to be run in some of the Khoisan languages (SABC News). Also worthy of mention is the fact that the new motto on the South African coat of arms is in a San language.

The following statistics should prove interesting:[17]

	African	Coloured	Asian	White	Other	Total
No.	31 127 631	3 600 446	1 045 596	4 434 697	375 204	40 583 574
%	76,7	8,87	2,58	10,93	9,25	100

Table 1: South African population by population group, 1996.

A further breakdown of the 76,7% of Table 1 shows that at least 17% (last two columns of Table 2) of first language speakers within South African borders stand to benefit from a work such as this one, especially since there is scarcity of precedents in this orientation.

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[16] <u>Chapter 1: Founding Provisions</u> of the 1996 Constitution of the RSA, Section 6 (Languages) has, among others, the following subsections:
(1) The official languages of the Republic are Sepedi, Sesotho, Setswana, siSwati, Tshivenda, Xitsonga, Afrikaans, English, isiNdebele, isiXhosa and isiZulu.
(2) Recognizing the historically diminished use and status of the indigenous languages of our people, the state must take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages....
(5) A Pan South African Language Board established by national legislation must -
    (a) promote, and create conditions for, the development and use of -
        (i) all official languages;
        (ii) the Khoi, Nama and San languages; and
        (iii) sign language...

[17] These figures (but not necessarily the arrangement) are derived from the SSA, Report No. 03-01-19 (1996) and Report No. 1:03-01-11 (1996). For a "unique set of inadequacies" regarding the census statistics of South Africa see Maartens (1998:18ff; cf. Van Warmelo 1952).

	Venda	Tsonga	Ndebele	Swazi	Zulu	Xhosa	Tswana	S. Sotho	N. Sotho
No.	876 409	1 756 105	586 962	1 013 194	9 200 144	7 196 116	3 301 773	3 104 199	3 695 846
%	2,2	4,4	1,5	2,5	22,9	17,9	8,2	7,7	9,2

Table 2: Home language by each 'African' population group, 1996.

Let me conclude this subsection by offering some working definitions. *The Basotho* are the people themselves (also called the Sotho-Tswana).[18] *Sesotho* refers to their way of life (language, custom and world view) generally; but it is also used of their language specifically. *Botho* embraces the ideal of human relations in community. Because there is only one ideal way of being human, *botho* has no plural form. It speaks of the way of thinking, speaking and acting that is 'life-friendly' as far as the Bantu can conceive. The bias and expectation is that the one being called *motho* (*umuntu*) is replete with *botho* (*ubuntu*). Accordingly, it can be said of a White person that *ke motho*. This is the perspective of Gabriel Setiloane (1976:21 sic) when he says, "So, the words 'MoSotho' and 'Motho' may be used interchangeably, implying that,...and without any suggestion of superiority to other men, 'MoSotho' is humankind."[19]

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[18] In my estimation, Batswana belong under the sub-group *Basotho* along with Bapedi and Bashweshwe. However as the binomial Sotho-Tswana betrays, their language is distinct. Johnston (1922:84) intimates that the languages "Sepedi and Sesotho [i.e. Seshweshwe] are barely separable as dialects" vis-a-vis Setswana. Disregarding the pretensions of Bashweshwe to the sole ownership of the category 'Basotho', *the Basotho* will henceforth designate Bapedi-Bashweshwe.
Whenever one Sesotho word or phrase is used in the text it is because both Northern and Southern Sotho render it that way. When there is a spelling variation between the two languages, I shall always begin with the Southern Sotho version followed by the Northern Sotho one. After the first twin appearance, however, only the Southern Sotho word or phrase and cognates will be used. With Nguni words only Zulu concepts will be deployed.

[19] The Zulu word for person, *umuntu*, is also sufficient to refer to 'a person of African descent.' *Umuntu omnyama* is basically a reverse translation of 'Black person' and therefore not a reliable reflection of Zulu thinking. There are two other phrases the Zulu use to designate 'Blacks': *abaNsundu* (from the word for the colour 'brown') and *abaMpisholo*. (i) Basotho as a super-category is recent if one considers the many 'tribes' / 'clans' clustered into that category. Prior to the aggregation that probably only came about during the heyday of anthropology, the different 'clans' did not need the super-category but spoke of one another with reference to different dialects or to the chief/founder of each 'clan.' No wonder the title Basotho is claimed or shared by the Bashweshwe and the Bapedi,

The conceptualization of *botho* is one of many proofs that Bantu languages possess "facilities for abstract expression" (Smith 1950:10). This is best illustrated in the physical relational sphere (e.g. *motho ke motho ka batho*). But in the religious sphere, although there is thought of the world beyond, it is almost always a mirror image of the present one (e.g. ancestors get thirsty, sleep, etc.). Speculation is not integral to Bantu religion, at least not to the degree that one encounters in other religions (cf. Smith 1950:87). The focus is always on the here and now; good deeds are good not because of some future reward but because of their effect on present relations.[20]

Finally, both my parents are Northern Sotho (Bakone under the chieftainship of the Makua's) from Sekhukhune-land in the Northen Province. But I was born and raised in Boipatong, at the opposite end of the then Transvaal. Although I studied Northern Sotho as mother tongue in school, I am more comfortable expressing myself in Southern Sotho - the dominant language of my region. Sesotho for me therefore is simultaneously both Northern and Southern.

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and both these groups often use it to refer to Black people in general. (ii) *Sotho* and *sothwana* (like the Zulu *nsundu*) are words for the colour 'brown' and if you add the human prefix 'mo-', then the reference is to a person of that particular skin shade (cf. Johnston 1922:82 where see n.1). (iii) Most unlikely, Mosotho might be the result of a contraction of *motho* + *so/tsho*, i.e. 'person' + 'black' which then gives the usual 'Black person' (cf. West 1976:133 and Casalis 1997). All this makes me wonder if *Basotho* and *Abansundu* were not coined at the encounter of Africans with people of other skin shades (whereas prior to that encounter the word for 'person' sufficed).

[20] See John S Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969 SPCK) and *New Testament Eschatology in an African Background - A Study of the Encounter between New Testament Theology and African Traditional Concepts* (1970 OUP) and critiques of him by other (African) theologians.

1.5 John's Prologue

1.5.1 *A Sharp Focus*

The Prologue to John's Gospel (1:1-18) is the locus of this study. Comprising the opening remarks of the book, and anticipating the rest of the Gospel, the passage is self-contained though "difficult to understand"(Haenchen 1980:101).[21] We shall restrict ourselves to a thorough analysis of the passage, bracketing out as much of the rest of John's Gospel or the Synoptic Gospels as possible. What might not be bracketed will have to be footnoted. The copious commentaries that exist around this pericope will also be interacted with.

There is pragmatic value in maintaining a sharp focus. Anyone interested in understanding something of the Basotho can best proceed by paying special attention to one aspect of their socio-cultural world (e.g. the place of circumcision). Owing to the reality that all aspects of life are intertwined and interdependent, such a study will reveal more about the Basotho than the student had hoped to find. But it is most profitable to proceed from a defined aspect of the life of the Basotho. The aspect of the Basotho that this study investigates is their appropriation of John 1:1-18. This is to say that the Prologue is not being studied for its own sake, but insofar as it is a Sesotho text that does and must convey certain meaning(s) to the Basotho.

Our premise is that John 1:1-18 (and the Bible as a whole) is part of the real world of the Basotho believers. But the Bible did not originate with the Basotho. It was imported from cultures and

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[21] "The section forms a whole, and is complete in itself; it is not necessary for anything to follow...(although it is) fully comprehensible to the man who knows the whole Gospel" (Bultmann 1971:13).

languages as distinct from Sesotho as can be. It was imported in order to instruct the Basotho believers concerning the ways of the God of the Bible. It is for this reason that we are unable to ignore translation dynamics; the Bible in Sesotho is a translated text!

We intend to decipher the various meanings that this pericope can and does convey from its Greek manuscripts and from the current Sesotho versions. We shall investigate the suitability of the Sesotho Bibles in terms of the 'perceived' (potential) and 'real' (felt) counsel that they encourage among the Basotho believers.

1.5.2 *The Process in Outline*

Clearly, we are confining ourselves to representatives, fully realizing that they have limited use. It would be too cumbersome for the present project to attempt a study of the reception of the whole Bible. Similarly, it would be too ambitious to try and get all the Basotho to relate their experiences with the Bible; and even more difficult to test the 'potential' impact of John 1:1-18 on a reliable representative sample. If it is acceptable to perceive John 1:1-18 as representative of the Bible, then it should be acceptable for my own reflections as a Mosotho to represent those of the Basotho. In fact, I am persuaded that this approach has the undeniable strength that it keeps the participants - myself and John 1:1-18 - humble throughout the exercise.

Chapter 2 develops the translation politics already hinted at in this introductory chapter. That is done in preparation for the appraisal of Sesotho translations (versions) of the Bible which takes place in chapters 3 and 4. In these chapters, as we read various Sesotho versions of John 1:1-18 carefully, we shall also be noting the fresh insights that such mother tongue reading confers, without disregarding current scholarly claims and contentions. Then in chapter 5 we shall sum up the main observations of this study and try to capture their implications for Biblical Studies.

Chapter 2

TRANSLATING AND TRANSLATIONS: THEORY AND PRACTICE

Whenever we attempt to translate we are pitched into a crisis of alterity. The experience of secondary otherness then emerges from the encounter with untranslatability (Budick 1996:22).

2.1 Originals and Translations of the Bible

2.1.1 *The Process*

We must say more (than we did in chapter 1) about the process that Bible translating is. This is necessary because the process of translating is a contested terrain. Stanley Porter (1999:18) says "The history of Bible translation is charged with ideological issues." It is the reasons that make translating so controversial that interest me at this point, and here follow some of them.

Bible translating is not a matter of aesthetics but of faith and conviction.[22] Bible translators therefore are not objective clinical scientists, though meticulous scientists they are. Bible translators are involved artists, i.e. they may not maintain a critical distance from what is being translated. Also, translations are usually commissioned. This makes it imperative for the envisioned products to speak the language of their day as well as the language of the commissioning tradition simultaneously in order to guarantee a warm and wide reception (cf. Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:5-7). (In the RSA, as far as I know, there are no misgivings over the rights to translate or publish the Bible.)

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[22] "Translation undertaken under conditions of *necessity* or perceived necessity is something altogether different than translation undertaken simply as the result of a desire to read what has been written in another language....(T)he large majority of biblical translators do not undertake their tasks to simply allow different language groups to read a nice book called the Bible, but rather because they believe that it is, for religious reasons, imperative that the content and message be communicated to these different language groups" (Pearson 1999:81).

Sanford Budick identifies another cause for these ideological issues, which he calls a *crisis of alterity*. He shows how in their supposed translatability, religions such as Christianity continue to encourage alterity (otherness) by "the pseudo-equation between self and other while at the same time, of course, abominating the pseudo-image of the other who resists translatability" (1996:15). This stresses the fact that translators are passionate participants in the process of translating, often at levels they are oblivious to.

To make matters worse, there are no preserved originals of the text of the Bible. What we have in most (and very critical) cases are divergent witnesses that textual critics must weigh against one another and against the context in order to approximate the 'original.' See Nida (1969:1-5) for at least ten other difficulties (cf. Whang 1999:47 n.3).

> It is, certainly, an interesting and somewhat daunting idea that this uncertainty exists concerning the meaning (and, in the case of textual criticism, content) of the documents upon which Christian (and, for the Hebrew Bible, Jewish) faith and practice are based, and with which Christians (and Jews) call others to do the same. Is it any wonder that translators of the Bible loathe to publicize this uncertainty? (Pearson 1999:81-82).

Then Daniel Arichea (1992) draws our attention to the question 'What is it that we are translating during Bible translation?' He adeptly explores whether it is the canon, the individual texts, ecclesiastical tradition or translators' own contexts.

Then there is the matter of the ideological provenance of the Bible. Itumeleng Mosala has decried the value of translating the biblical text without due consideration of the power dynamics that lie behind the production of this text (West 1991:64-75). He feels that even in the Hebrew and Greek, the Bible

is a propaganda work of the powerful that must not be appropriated unideologically. For Mosala therefore, Bible translation cannot be indifferent, uninterested or clinical.[23]

Post-colonial translation critics like Musa Dube (1997; 1999) take this argument to another level. They are suspicious of the fact that it is the powerful of society who commission and even carry out translations. Whereas for Mosala it is the 'production' of the Bible that is problematic, for post-colonialists it is the 're-production' that must be watched closely. Translating, say post-colonialists Bassnett and Triverdi (1999:2), "does not happen in a vacuum, but in a continuum." These theorists premise their point on the argument that translations are interpretations. As long as interpreting is carried out from a particular ideological stance, and interpreters are human beings with social allegiances, it is impossible to conceive of a 'free' translation.[24] In fact, translators can legitimately be seen as authors insofar as they create new texts and make certain and not other choices. "The translator resolves for that one of the possible solutions which promises a maximum of effect with a minimum of effort" (Bassnett-McGuire 1980:37; cf. Bell 1991:7).

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[23] '*Interested*' readings are committed and context-engaging while '*interesting*' readings are detached, objective, scientific, neutral and "encourage the maintenance of a plurality of interests." (West 1991:50-51; cf. *idem* 1992). Commending Mosala's *Biblical Hermeneutics and Black Theology in South Africa* (1989 Eerdmans), Tinyiko Maluleke (1996:11) declares: "[Mosala's] diagnosis is that by equating the Bible with the Word of God, Black theologians have mistakenly made the Bible both an historical and harmonious book with one message for all people in all situations for all time. Yet in reality, this view of the Bible amounts to an endorsement of the view of the powerful on the Bible. Such a view, is in fact 'pro-humanity but anti-Black-working class and anti-Black-women.' Mosala is specifically concerned that the equation of the Bible with and to the Word of God implies that it is possible to appropriate the Bible unideologically."

[24] "Modern biblical translations inevitably arise out of particular political and cultural contexts. Translators are themselves products of one or another political culture. The ability to publish and disseminate the result of translation is also governed by local publishing conventions. Even the textual bases selected in translation and the linguistic medium employed rarely are entirely outside the influence of local political and cultural constraints" (Batalden 1992:68).

Lastly, translating is usually for rather than with the *hoi polloi*. Although one understands the constraints faced by those who must protect the quality of the resultant translation, perhaps it is still not impossible to involve the local people on a larger scale. For instance, translators as lettered people may in places over-assume or patronize. With all these and other constraints, is it any wonder that Andrew Walls calls Bible translating "the art of the impossible"? (1992:24). But what of the product of translation?

2.1.2 *The Product*

> Every text is unique and, at the same time, it is the translation of another text. No text is entirely original because language itself, in its essence, is already a translation. (So) all texts are original because every translation is distinctive. Every translation, up to a certain point, is an invention and as such it constitutes a unique text (Octavio Paz cited in Bassnett-McGuire 1980:38).

Roger Bell (1991) and Gideon Toury (1985; 1995), of the Descriptive Translation Studies school, feel that the process can be systematically and objectively described, and that the evaluation of the product is always subjective and unfruitful. Granting that the process is beset by difficulties, that translators are fallible and involved, and acknowledging Paz's counsel, how may we best estimate the quality of a resultant translation? I agree with Bell and Toury that it is not enough to do so only on the basis of linguistic or literary principles, though these are more important than the theological, canonical, and doctrinal grounds (cf. Arichea, 1992:41-42).[25]

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[25] A translation of the Bible should by definition transcend Theo Hermans's observation (1985:8): "The conventional approach to literary translation, then, starts from the assumption that translations are not only second-hand, but also generally second-rate, and hence not worth too much serious attention. A translation may have its limited use as a stepping-stone to an original work, but it cannot presume to form part of the recognized corpus of

Considering the potency of the Bible in any tongue, there must be some way to assess the product in spite of the process. For critics to only compare the translation with the 'original' as though they are in possession of an authentic copy of the ideal translation is insufficient. The key, I believe lies in two further points, namely, the place of the (translated) Bible in the believing (receptor) community *and* the ability of the Bible to transcend human limitations or impositions.

The first aspect refers to the role and place accorded the Bible within the receptor culture. It is amazing how the Bible in its various mother tongue versions is firmly owned and upheld by believers, with little awareness of (or interest in) the fact that it is an imported (translated) text. Even in places where they do not understand the intended meaning, they expend themselves with the hope of one day seeing the light. What facilitates this popular acceptance of the Bible?

Among several factors: (a) The ease with which the language employed in Bible translations lends itself to popular discourse, distinguishing those who belong from those who do not. The authors of books of the Bible wrote in the tongue of the ordinary believer, making the Bible easy to relate to, memorize, and recite. (b) Translators pay close attention to phrases and idioms of the receptor culture. As a result the translated Bible becomes a reservoir of the people's cultural heritage while simultaneously allowing them to speak respectfully about and to God.

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literary texts....Taking the supremacy of the original for granted from the start, the study of translation then serves merely to demonstrate that original's outstanding qualities by highlighting the errors and inadequacies of any number of translations of it."

The second aspect relates to what the Bible and other texts like it - possessing built-in subversive qualities - are able to do in partnership with the uncanny creativity of the masses.[26] It is this factor that I wish Mosala could acknowledge, because even if the Bible is a product of the ruling elite, and although committed Bible critics can decipher these behind-the-scenes dynamics, the proletariat are not as naive as they often let on. It does not require much effort to discover resonances with one's own experiences in the Bible. These mirror images become the hermeneutical key with which the ordinary believer reads the Bible. In the face of all this, it seems fair to conclude that the translated Bible soon transcends its alien status and acquires full citizenship among the literary achievements of the receptor culture. Another side to this aspect belongs to 'Christianity's Translatability.'

2.2 Christianity's Cultural Translatability

"There is a history of translation of the Bible because there was a translation of the Word into flesh" (Walls 1992:24).

2.2.1 Translatability Celebrated

Christianity's 'infinite cultural translatability'[27] is celebrated by some theologians[28] as the

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[26] I was recently intrigued by a play entitled *The Maids* based on a translation of Jean Genet's *Les Bonnes*, in *L'Arbalete* no. 12 (Lyons:1947). It portrays these dynamics so graphically that it is impossible not to get the message.

[27] The expression is owed to Andrew Walls ("The Gospel as the prisoner and liberator of culture" in *Faith and Thought* vol. 108, nos 1-2, 1981:39). It is admirable that Walls (1992:28) qualifies this principle as predating Christianity, whatever the implications: "The translation principle was at work even in Christianity's ante-natal period. At least by the second century before the Christian era, the Jewish Scriptures were being turned into Greek."

[28] In concert with their ardent critic, I single out as representatives "two of the most innovative African theological thinkers of our times, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako" (Maluleke 1996:3). Maluleke continues: "Both of them are important, innovative voices whose thinking bears significant implications for African theology as the twentieth century draws to a close"; and yet their being treated together "must not be taken to mean that Sanneh and

factor largely responsible for Christianity's ability to be simultaneously universal and domestic in

Africa, as anywhere else. Here, among other things, the line between linguistic and cultural

translations blurs:

> The explanation for this must lie with Christianity's refusal of a "sacred" language. With the
> exception of the dominance of Latin in the European phase of Christianity, Christianity in the
> course of its expansion has developed generally as a "vernacular" religion. In particular, the
> history of the modern missionary movement could equally well be written as the history of
> Bible translation....
> Since the internal logic of the Christian faith rejects an imposed sacred language, the Bible in
> the vernacular still remains in every respect the Word of God, so that in course of time the
> vernacular Bible would become an independent yardstick by which to test and sometimes to
> reject what missionaries taught and did, whilst it also provided the basis for development of
> new indigenous forms of Christianity, as has been documented in studies on the rise of
> Independency (Bediako 1988:453-4).

African Independent Churches (AICs) truly provide evidence for this assertion by refusing the

exegetical and homiletical principles of missionary Christianity. They find allies in the Old Testament

with whose help they can fashion a Christianity that is at home in the African experience. African

Christianity owes this phenomenon to the availability of the Bible in the various African vernaculars.

Similarly, the various mother tongue grammars, literacy, yesteryear's resistance of colonial rule, and

so forth also owe their genesis to missionary translating.

In *Translating the Message*, Lamin Sanneh declares that Christianity resolved from its very onset

"to relativize its Judaic roots" and simultaneously "to destigmatize Gentile culture" (1989:1). This

radical pluralism occurred at two levels - of language and of culture. The Gospel was expressible in

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Bediako present us with exactly the same agenda" (1997b:19). My review of their thinking is brief and patchy, lest I merely reproduce literature that is readily accessible and makes for great reading.

any language, and Jewish customs such as circumcision were substituted with Hellenistic equivalents. "Central to this [dual] movement is the practice of translation epitomised in the oft-repeated translation of the Scriptures from one language to another" (Maluleke 1996:4). The relative failure of Islam in Africa may thus be attributed to its insistence on one holy language. The Bible (somewhat synonymous with 'the Word of God') is made available in Sesotho while Sesotho is simultaneously placed on the global stage.

> The linguistic projects of mother tongue development belong preeminently to this unrehearsed side of missionary history, and exploring them should reveal meaningful vistas into indigenous reserves of culture and religion. We will not get to that level if we restrict our view to the handy rhetoric of caricature or hagiography....By their root conviction that the gospel is transmissible in the mother tongue, I suggest, missionaries opened the way for the local idiom to gain the ascendancy over assertions of foreign superiority (Sanneh 1993:18-19).

The reminder that serious engagement with African languages by early missionaries led to an apprehension of the fact that the African does not have to abandon his/her mother tongue in order to fully understand God's Word is invaluable. The implications are evident: (i) the African does not have to abandon his/her mother tongue in order to contribute to world Christianity. The best way that Africans can meaningfully contribute to the development of world Christianity, these scholars insist, is if the Bible recognizes their mother tongues as a worthy medium while remaining open to the insights made available by being captured in those mother tongues.

(ii) The burden of colonial languages (missionaries' vernaculars) on Africans is mitigated. In other words, to enlist Batalden's eloquence (1992:75), "the elevation of the West into a kind of paradigm against which (African) self-identification occurs" is rendered a bygone tendency. If now God speaks

Sesotho and Sesotho has acquired global significance, then what God is saying to me in Sesotho is valid in spite of what God has said to the West. I may, nevertheless, check what God has said to the rest of the world (which I do in this study) out of interest but not out of a need for affirmation.

I hope Walls has the same thing in mind when he says (1992:27):

> The various translations can always be compared, not only with the original, but with other translations made from the same original....Diversity arising from the penetration of new culture complexes is not incompatible with coherence arising from the fact that the various translations have been made from a common original.

2.2.2 *Translatability Critiqued*

However, as I see it, the claims made by these scholars might very well have been made by John Wycliffe and other pioneer Bible translators into mother tongues, and every country hosts a few of these. Those who find these scholars' claims somewhat off the mark, have perhaps taken for granted this passé quality of the assertions. Then there is almost unanimity among translation theorists that "no culture can be reproduced completely in any literary text, just as no source text can be fully reproduced in a translation" (Tymoczko 1999:23). This cautions against pushing matters too far since translation cannot ever be comprehensive enough. Culture A will never fully understand culture B on B's own terms! (cf. Lefevere 1999:77). Also, equating culture and language as the proponents of translatability tend to do is very risky business (cf. Bassnett-McGuire 1980:32f).

Black Theologian Tinyiko Maluleke (1997a) advances the view that when insisting on the translatability of the gospel as an "intellectual and historic category in its own right," Bediako and,

more so, Sanneh are engaged in "an effort to separate the gospel from (Western) Christianity" in order to resolve "the alleged foreignness of Christianity in Africa." For Maluleke this is untenable because "such a pure gospel is difficult to extract" even from the Bible. In the face of what has gone and still goes on in Africa in the name of Christianity, Maluleke challenges Bediako and Sanneh to rethink the real import of Christianity's translatability. "The fact", he admonishes, "that the Christian gospel is translatable has not stopped some powerful cultures in history from arresting and 'domesticating' it, sometimes for centuries!"[29]

Maluleke then contends (1998b): "Christianity is not an African religion and this is where Bediako is mistaken. However it can become the 'property' of Africans and this is what I am attracted to." Such ownership of Christianity must not be blind and all-affirming but "hard-nosed and honest," admitting "both the blessings and the curses of the Christian presence on the continent." The last bone to pick is with the "idea" that "the universal gospel is able to manifest itself locally precisely because it is universal." This tends "to minimise the uniqueness of the local context" while "what passes for universal gospel is often nothing more than the gospel as understood by those who are powerful in the given situation." The gospel must emerge "out of a local situation in unique ways" and this among other things will mean abandoning the simplistic *equation* of the Bible with the Word of God.

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[29] This is a rephrasing of an even more thoroughgoing earlier statement (1996:8): "Africans must first cease to experience Christianity as alienating and foreign before they can start discussing Christianity as non-foreign and non-Western. The fact that many African churches, for example, are still Western in polity, theology, doctrine and worship cannot be swept aside by mere enthusiasm for an African brand of Christianity."

Maluleke has elsewhere (1996:10) intimated that "It is on the basis of this equation that translation and vernacularisation acquire such a lofty status in the arguments of both Bediako and Sanneh." (I sympathize with Bediako [and Sanneh] because since starting to work consciously in Sesotho, I have discovered that it would be impossible to get one Mosotho with whom to debate in Sesotho whether the Bible *is* or *contains* the Word of God. The question just does not arise.)

2.3 Translating in This Study

2.3.1 *The Need for Interested Translatability*

Apart from taking into account the material realities of Africans, there are also issues relating to the quality of the translations, as for example in cases where 'ancestors' were equated with 'demons.'[30]

Is it not the case that the mother tongue versions of the Bible are viewed in a similar light as the AICs by the rest of the academy, i.e. as second-rate and marginal? In other words, are these translations the best that there could have been? In fact the dearth of mother tongue biblical reflection and studies thereof in the academy (other than for those to whom English is the mother tongue), together with ceaseless schisms within African Christianity resulting in the chronic mushrooming of new 'churches'

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[30] Eric A Hermanson (1999) intimates: "The first Setswana Bible to use *badimo* to translate daimonizomai and its cognates is the one first published in 1908, which is described by Coldham as 'a revision made chiefly by A J Wookey, assisted by nationals'....It should be noted that subsequent translations did not use *badimo* in these passages." Hermanson's paper convincingly shows Dube's critique of the Setswana Bible (Dube 1999) to be far from credible on several grounds. But, obviously, the successful discrediting of Dube's misinformed illustration is not tantamount to the denial of the assertions of post-colonialists.

often make one wonder if our mother tongue renditions of the Bible (not excluding the many English versions on the market) are as useful as they should be.

It is not enough that the Bible is available in Sesotho if this reality has no place in the academy. Otherwise, whether concerning the translating or the teaching of the Bible, Bassnett & Trivedi (1999:13) are justified in saying:

> Meanwhile, however, the old business of translation as traffic between languages still goes on in the once-and-still colonized world, reflecting more acutely than ever before the asymmetrical power relationship between the various local 'vernaculars' (i.e. the languages of the slaves, etymologically speaking) and the one master-language of our post-colonial worlds, English.

I accept the Sesotho Bible as both a translated and a bona fide Sesotho text within the corpus of Sesotho literature. As a translated text it can always be improved upon: "Almost all translated sentences have room for improvement. If the translator spends more time reviewing the translation, the sentences can be made smoother and more readable" (Whang, 1999:47).

As a bona fide text it can contribute towards biblical exegesis. The presence of loaded mother tongue concepts in the Bible goes a long way in sanctifying or censuring a people's ways and practices. For example a Mosotho might deduce from John 1:10f that *Lentswe* (the Word) has always been at work among his/her people prior to the advent of missionaries. To such a person, it would be disrespectful to insinuate that *Badimo* (ancestors) and the practices they established for posterity are ungodly since

to do so would be to deny the influence of *Lentswe* upon these forebears.[31] So the biblical text

becomes the 'independent' but docile standard for the articulation of the Word in Sesotho, allowing

for the gospel to emerge from below as with AICs. It is out of mutual respect and dialogue between

the academy and popular exegeses that the value of the mother tongue Bible might be fully shown.

Textual criticism demands that in this case we *involve* the Greek mss of the Bible. This involvement

of the Greek mss is not motivated by the sheer desire to demonstrate the inadequacies of Sesotho in

relation to capturing and reproducing the beauty of the original. It is also not premised on the

assumption that Sesotho as a language is inferior to Greek nor on the ambition to demonstrate that

Sesotho outdoes Greek in being "rich, flexible, expressive, musical, capable of infinite

development."[32] On the contrary, the Greek text is here recruited as an umpire to check both myself

and the current Sesotho translations lest it be found that either of us has, as it were, created our own

'word' with its own spirit. Ironically, therefore, Greek - the closest we can get to the NT original -

is a stepping stone towards a clearer hearing of God's Word in Sesotho.

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[31] Likewise Justin Martyr's perception of Heraclitus, Socrates and Plato as 'Christians' before Christ (see Blunt 1911:xiii, 8 n.11, 12; Bernard 1928:14; and Martyr 1861:35, 60-66).

[32] To borrow Edwin W Smith's phrase (*The Golden Stool: Some aspects of the Conflict of Cultures in modern Africa* 1926:302) cited in Sanneh 1993:75.

2.3.2 *Some Qualifications as We Translate*

Like mainstream translation perspectives, we accept the practice of translating as necessary and unavoidable.[33] It seems the easiest for everyone to learn everyone else's culture and language, thereby evading the need for translations. But this is not a plausible position because (a) at which forums could the learning of *all* languages take place? and (b) hearing, like translating, involves interpretation and is culture-specific (non-mother tongue and mother tongue hearers do not hear the same things to the same degree).

But most theorists continue to presuppose 'missionary translating,' i.e. translating from the translator's or another great mother tongue to the 'target' (*alter*) language. "Relations between languages can generally be regarded as two-directional, though not always symmetrical. Translation, as a process, is always uni-directional: it is always performed in a given direction 'from' a *Source Language* 'into' a *Target Language*" (Catford 1965:20).

However, during translation both the source and target languages stand to gain. Sanford Budick urges the "experience of the copresence of cultures" and the ability to look "back and forth at the same time" during translating (1996:12). Louis Luzbetak (1992:109f) speaks of *contextual translation*. He identifies "three different cultural contexts" that must constitute this contextual

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[33] For Walls, who sees a parallel between translation and conversion, these challenges are part of the plan. "We may take it that the endemic hazards and problems of translation are a necessary part of the process of Christian mission. Key words or concepts without an obvious equivalent in the receptor language, central Biblical images rooted in the soil or history of the Middle East or the usages of the Roman Empire, the shift of meaning in apparently corresponding words, the luggage that receptor language terms carry with them - these are the means by which the word about Christ is applied to the *distinctives* of a culture, and thus to its commanding heights" (1992:26-27).

translation: (a) the sacred writers' 'original' message (largely culturally conditioned), (b) the translators' own cultural presuppositions, and (c) the culture of the readers of the translation.[34] But he lives in a time where the translator is a foreigner to the target culture. This is not necessarily to say that his deductions are not applicable to insider-translators like myself. Clearly though, in my case Luzbetak's *b* and *c* are one and the same thing; that leaves me (i) his *a*, (ii) his *bc* and (iii) *d*, namely, the global culture, the non-Mosotho reader's culture.

So for those of us who are working from within, some revision of the presuppositions seems called for. English or some other European language has mediated the translation of the Bible into several African mother tongues. In the present case, however, English is a messenger not between my Greek and Sesotho exegesis, but between Sesotho and the rest of the world. I think of it as a *diplomatic language*, one that, once the translation work is done, may be employed to afford the rest of the world access to insights gleaned from Sesotho Bible reading.

Insider-translating, therefore, approximates very closely what is traditionally termed 'biblical exegesis.' It becomes impossible to do the one without concurrently carrying out the other. But still, the sending culture tends to do more than might have been foreseen by the translators. "Translation necessarily marks the border crossing where, if anywhere, one culture passes over to the other, whether to inform it, to further its development, to capture or enslave it, or merely to open a space between the other and itself" (Budick 1996:11).

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[34] Porter, affirming Tymoczko (and thus Luzbetak) on this responsibility of the translator, concludes: "This is a very tall order for any translation project" (1999:45).

Then also the 'receiving' culture imposes itself on the transmitted text, particularly in (a) the nuances and connections that the outsider might be totally oblivious to, (b) the degree of development and the constant evolution of language and (c) the range of available concepts. So that *presence* does not always mean truthful representation just as *absence* does not always mean silence or successful repression.

Lastly, we must grant that *meaning* cannot be abstracted, it is always context-specific. Meaning is "a complex of relations of various kinds between the component terms of a context of situation" (Bassnett-McGuire 1980:21). It would be dangerous to presuppose unanimity among ancient hearers of the text, for one thing modern experience indicates otherwise. Besides the presupposition that there was only one 'hearing of' and 'responding to' the Bible by ancient hearers, another ill-advised but common practice is to presume that we, modern readers, *can* 'know' what the original hearers heard and thus how they responded (cf. Whang 1999:52). Good translating can best be carried out with the modern hearers in mind without denying the sending culture its prerogative to inform, develop, capture and/or simply make acquaintance with the target culture (cf. Bassnett-McGuire 1980:13; Lefevere 1999:75-76; Bassnett & Lefevere 1990:11; & Tymoczko 1985).

This oversimplified version of the debate around translation matters brings home the message that we are treading on holy ground. The present project seeks to make a contribution towards Johannine studies by sharing insights gleaned from reading John in Sesotho. We shall consider what the rest of scholarship says on John 1:1-18, without conferring upon any of the communicants a sense of dependance, inferiority or superiority.

In other words, we differ with post-colonial translation theorists when they object to *both* the translating of indigenous works into the idiom of dominant discourse *and* the translating into indigenous idiom of material associated with the hegemonic powers that once were, still are, and/or are actively campaigning to stay in power (see Bassnett & Trivedi 1999:5-13).

Introversionism cannot be the solution that modern Africa must hope for. It is legitimate (i) to acquire and master as many diplomatic languages as possible without losing grip of our own roots, and (ii) from time to time to translate from Sesotho into the diplomatic languages the insights gained from Sesotho exegesis. Diplomacy is context-specific, what is etiquette in Jerusalem may be blasphemous in Rome. Moreover, in another time and place, Sesotho itself will act as a diplomatic language. The impossible continues to be the necessary!

Chapter 3

JOHN 1:1-18: SOME PRELIMINARY CONSIDERATIONS

Lentswe... Bua... x3
Lentswe ke la Jesu
Ha re rapela Morena re tla pholoswa ke Yena,
Bua, Lentswe ke la Jesu

3.1 *Lentswe* in Sesotho

3.1.1 *The Range of Meaning*

The above Southern Sotho chorus[35] was evoked by my first conscious Sesotho Bible study

session on John 1:1-18. I have sung it many times and accorded it various meanings that came to

mind, but reading John 1:1-18 in Sesotho has given it concrete scriptural grounding. It is not a far-

fetched thing to associate *Lentswe* with a speaking subject. For one thing, both the Basotho and the

Nguni are in the habit of using *Lentswe* and *Lizwi* respectively as proper names ("...it was missionaries

who persuaded the Kgatla chief, Lentswe, to abolish polygamy" Setiloane, 1976:2). *Lentswe* among

African Christians often refers to the Bible and/or Jesus.

But *Lentswe* means 'Word' or 'Voice' depending on the context. All that the chorus betrays is that

the *Lentswe* it is talking of belongs to Jesus. Do the Basotho differentiate conceptually between

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[35] Traditional, author unknown. This chant is known to most South Africans because of its popularity in night vigils and such interdenominational events. It is a very spirited refrain, sung with conviction and the expectation that indeed the Word is about to address the people. It may be translated "Oh Word, Speak x3; The Word is of Jesus; If we pray (to) the Lord we shall be saved by 'Him'; Speak, The Word is of Jesus." This is perhaps the place to note that Sesotho does not need the services of an indefinite or definite article. And *Yena* (unlike 'Him') has no gender and thus no gender bias as to the conception of *Lentswe* and *Morena*.

'voice' and 'word' although they have one word for both? Perhaps an example from their religious reality might be enlightening.

Visitations from the 'living dead' are significant because some message is always received from them. But ancestors do not always speak out; sometimes they just stand there and allow their appearance or posture to speak on their behalf. In fact being possessed of the spirit is not an end in itself. People who are possessed are only of value once they start conveying messages from the other world. Nonetheless what is important is that some message is communicated and the onus rests on the recipients to painstakingly obey *Lentswe leo la Baholo* (that Word of/from the Ancestors). In this instance *Lentswe* does not refer to 'voice' but to *the essence of the communication*.

But the Bible is understood to be *Lentswe la Modimo* (the Word of God). The red and black book is very potent in this symbolism-fond world. Once my father almost punished me for underlining or writing notes in the Bible. God spoke, the Words were captured in this holy Book, and the Words do spring to life whenever the Book is opened. In fact in some AICs, the Bible is opened randomly and the preaching (or rather, the message) of the day is derived from whichever passage stares at the reader. So far as I can see, *Lentswe* is found in the Bible in much the same way that it is procurable from one who has had a visitation from the world beyond.

When one gives a speech, his/her voice (*lentswe*) must be audible, and his/her words (*mantswe*, plural form) must be wholesome. Clearly therefore, the Basotho do differentiate between what is said and that which conveys it. But the latter is significant only because of its association with the former, and

the former is of import only because it represents the speaker. This is perhaps the reason the Sesotho Bible is better read aloud than silently by individuals. And perhaps why they do not differentiate between word and voice, is because you cannot hear the voice without simultaneously hearing (the words of) the speaker.

So the Basotho believers reading John 1:1-18 will not ask questions like 'Where does *Lentswe* stand in relation to the Holy Trinity?' On the contrary, the concern will almost always be 'Whose *Lentswe* is it?' and 'What is *Lentswe* saying?' In the refrain above, the voice is thus understood as the carrier of the message. '*Lentswe Bua*' then means 'eject your contents, oh messenger.' The preoccupation is with the source (the Word is of Jesus) and interests (the contents) of *Lentswe*. *Lentswe* is being solicited, as a messenger, for 'direction from above.'

It is comparable to what happens during an exorcism. The exorcist appears (to an uninvolved observer) to be harshly dealing with the victim. But in his/her mind, and on the basis of the responses observed from the victim, it actually unfolds that it is the demon that is being addressed. So the distinction between the source of the Word, the messenger of the Word, and the Word itself sometimes gets foggy.

Excursus: *Lentswe* in John 1

We might just find further illustration of the potency of *Lentswe* in the passage immediately following the Prologue. The equally popular John 1:19-28 presents John the Baptizer as saying of himself that he is the *Lentswe* "of one crying in the wilderness."[36] Whereas the Hebrew קוֹל is appropriately rendered φωνή and means 'voice', the usage of *Lentswe* in Sesotho is problematic. Just after focusing so heavily on *Lentswe* in vv1-18, the Baptizer's identification of himself with *Lentswe* has overtones, to say the least. The trouble is not quite allayed by the assurances that John is not 'the light' but a mere witness thereof (vv6-9); nor by his 'preference' of the One coming after him (v15). Neither is it quenched by the rendering of *Lentswe* in small letters as opposed to the Prologue's capital letters - this redacting may impress the careful reader, but definitely not the hearer. Nonetheless John the Baptizer does not claim to be the unknown source of the voice of Isaiah 40:3f. But by claiming to be the voice, he is affirming that (a) the voice and its source are different entities, (b) if the voice is a person, then its source must definitely have personal attributes, (c) the voice of someone is a faithful carrier of that someone. Therefore (i) *Lentswe* will always belong to some source, (ii) *Lentswe* and its source, though distinguishable, are qualitatively one (*Lentswe* is never free from its source's control), and (iii) it is possible and not unusual for *Lentswe - voice* in the Baptizer's case and *word* in the case of the Prologue's *Logos* - to be a person.

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[36] Isaiah 40:3f (to which John 1:23f is referring) is equally charged. Claus Westermann (1969:36f) says, "Verse 3 [is] vague and cryptic....Whose the voice is, is deliberately left unsaid. The prophet obviously intended to make the speaker hard to recognize....(And) The person of the hearer is of no importance." Furthermore 'in the wilderness' belongs with 'to prepare' rather than with the crying voice, "in spite of the tradition represented in the LXX and the citations of the passage in the New Testament." Skinner (1922:1ff.) confirms that 'in the wilderness' belongs with 'prepare' though he acknowledges those who insist otherwise. "A voice is heard calling on unseen agencies to prepare a way for Jehovah through the desert....The word 'voice' here and often has the force of an interjection; render accordingly: **Hark! one crying**. The voice is not that of God... neither is it a human voice."

3.1.2 *Related Concepts*

But is *Lentswe* the only available Sesotho concept to translate the *Logos*? Three other words come close *thero, taba* and *polelo*, and I investigate them briefly. *Morero* (scheme) is the abstract noun derived from the verb *ho rera* ('to plan' or 'to intend to do'). The less abstract noun from the same verb, *thero*, has acquired a declarative sense and thus become restricted to preaching. So preaching is the declaration of God's plans and/or intentions (i.e. God's Word).

The SABC Southern and Northern Sotho News Broadcasts are duly entitled *Ditaba* (plural). This usage approximates the meaning 'information.' The listener is not subjected to the words there spoken in the same manner that she or he would have to heed *Lentswe*. For one thing, the presenter is not sent by the source but is merely a 'middle-man' - quite unlike the messenger of *Lentswe*. *Ditaba*, at least at the level of the broadcast, are ideas that the listener may or may not do much about. *Puo/polelo* is simply a noun from the verb 'to speak' (*ho bua* and *go bolela*) and therefore means 'speech' or, more aptly, 'saying' and/or 'expression.'

In the Sesotho Bibles, *taba* and *polelo* sometimes translate ὁ λόγος (They also translate *pragmateia/pragmation* [matter/affair/issue/ etc.] as in 2 Cor. 7:11 and 1 Thess. 4:6). For example in John 10:19, τοὺς λόγους τούτους is rendered in interesting ways. The KJV says 'those sayings' while the RSV renders it 'these words.' The 1987 Southern Sotho and 1986 Northern Sotho versions follow the KJV (*dipolelo tseo*) while the 1989 Southern Sotho version follows the RSV (*mantswe ana*). It is more compelling to go along with the RSV since the speaker of the words is in the background. In other words, 'of Jesus' is understood. Similarly, in Acts 15:15 *mantswe* is preferred

to *ditaba* because reference is to the prophets.

However in Mark 1:45 τὸν λόγον is rendered in all Sesotho versions as *taba*. Reference is clearly to 'the deed' (vv41-42) rather than to the 'instruction' (vv43-44) of Jesus per se. The same is the case in Acts 15:6 where τοῦ λόγου τούτου is unanimously rendered '*taba ena/eo.*' The same abstract reference to λόγος independently of its source is found in Acts 8:21 and the Sesotho versions give '*tabeng ena*' (except for the 1986 Northern Sotho version which employs '*lentšu*').

It is useful that *taba* and *polelo* translate the more abstract references to ὁ λόγος and *Lentswe* is used in cases of the words themselves. *Lentswe* is always heard, while *taba* and *polelo* are often contemplated upon. The debate whether the Bible *is* or *contains* the Word of God does not quite arise. God speaks through, within and outside of the Bible - the important thing is that God is heard. It is for these reasons that we support the choice of *Lentswe* for the translation of the *Logos*. But what is the *Logos*?

3.2 Understanding *the Logos*

> The movement from Judaism to Christianity to Islam is part of the developing biography of God in the human mind since those ancient Stone Age days when he was associated with tricksterism and shamanism (Leeming & Page 1996:162).

3.2.1 *The Logos in Others*

Let us begin with some definitions. Liddell & Scott's definition for λόγος is (A) *the word or*

that by which the inward thought is expressed, Lat. *oratio*; and, (B) *the inward thought itself*, Lat.

ratio (also Arndt & Gingrich's protracted point 3 under λόγος [1957:480]).

Regarding the use of the *Logos* in the Hellenistic world - the immediate background of John's Gospel

- the following summary seems apt:

> It was at Ephesus, the traditional site of John's Gospel, that Heraclitus in the 6th century B.C. first introduced *logos* into Greek philosophical thought. Striving to explain the continuity amid all the flux that is visible in the universe, Heraclitus resorted to *logos* as the eternal principle of order in the universe. The *logos* is what makes the world a *kosmos*. (2) For the Stoics the *logos* was the mind of God (a rather pantheistic God who penetrated all things), guiding, controlling, and directing all things. (3) Philo used the *logos* theme (over 1200 times in his works) in his attempt to bring together the Greek and Hebrew worlds of thought. For Philo, the *logos*, created by God, was the intermediary between God and His creatures; God's *logos* was what gave meaning and plan to the universe. It was almost a second god, the instrument of God in creation, and the pattern of the human soul. However, neither the personality nor the pre-existence of the *logos* was clear in Philo, and the Philonian *logos* was not connected to life. (4) In the later Hermetic literature the *logos* was the expression of the mind of God, helping to create and order the world. (5) In the Mandean liturgies we hear of 'the word of life,' 'the light of life,' etc. These may be distant echoes of borrowings from Christian thought. (6) As for the more general field of Gnosticism, 'the Word' occurs...(but Gnosticism is) considerably later than John (Brown 1966:520).

Within Judaism *Logos* predominantly translates דבר (*dbr*) in the LXX, particularly in the historical

books (Brown 1978:1087). This is significant because *dbr* like *Logos* has two senses.[37] *Dbr YHWH*

(The Word of the Lord) exhibits many of the features ascribed to *the Logos* in the Johannine Prologue

(see Brown 1966:521 for the numerous instances). *Memra* of the Targums is Aramaic for 'word.'

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[37] "It follows...that in the word *dabar* there is always contained something of the thing itself, that the thing itself is only ever accessible in the word, and that the word cannot be separated from its content nor the content from the word. ...it is not the prophet who avails himself of the word, but Yahweh's word which takes the prophet into its service" (Brown 1978:1087-8; cf. Tasker 1960:41; Brown 1966:521). The same could be said of *Logos* and *Lentswe*.

Here the *Memra YHWH* is a surrogate for God Himself. "This is not a personification, but the use of

Memra serves as a buffer for divine transcendence" (Brown 1966:523-4).

In the New Testament the *Logos* refers to the message about Jesus (e.g. Mark 4:14-15 and Acts

8:25). It is also used in the 'Johannine Literature' (Richardson 1959:11; Barrett 1955:49) in terms

very similar or allusive to the Gospel's Prologue (e.g. 1 John 1:1 and Revelation 19:11-16).

3.2.2 *The Prologue's Logos*

In trying to address the influences of the then world upon the Evangelist's thought, Raymond

Brown urges the consideration of two possibilities; "first, that the idea of the *Logos* came from the

Hellenistic world of thought; second, that the basic components of the idea of the 'the Word' came

from a Semitic background, and when this idea was translated into Greek, *Logos* was chosen to

express it because of the connotations this term had in the Hellenistic world" (1966:519; cf. Dodd

1953:278). The *Logos*-feature, particularly the Word become flesh,[38] is the starkest distinguisher of

John's Gospel from the Synoptics (and the OT); Westcott (1964:lxxvii) calls it "a new phase of

Christian thought" (cf. Cullmann 1976).[39]

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[38] Tasker, who calls John's Gospel "the Gospel of the Word-made-flesh" (1960:38), says John's is "the Word not as an invisible influence to be contemplated only by the imagination, but the *Word-made-flesh*" (1960:43).

[39] Leeming & Page (1996:166-7 sic): "Although Christians have accepted the Genesis story as part of their religious heritage, the increase of non-Jewish - that is gentile, and especially Greek - philosophy in the first century C.E. led to a new interpretation of that story. The beginning of the New Testament Gospel of John is, in effect, a Christian creation story that concentrates on the establishment of the divinity of Jesus as part of a triune god (Father, Son, and holy Spirit) who is really no longer Yahweh of the Old Testament. John's Word is at once the creative word of Yahweh in the Genesis creation and the ordering essence of God, which is incarnate in Jesus, but which was there as a part of God at the creation."

But then, in what sense does the Evangelist use the *Logos* concept? Scholars refute Hellenic and Hellenistic dependence.[40] So the Evangelist does not draw from Platonism or Stoicism. Neither does he depend on the Hermetica (contra Barrett 1955:31-32) nor on Mandean literature (contra Bultmann 1971:25-31); moreover there is no Mandean work like John's Gospel. He also does not lean on Hellenistic Jews like Philo or movements like the Qumran either, since these like him rely on the OT (Brown 1966:introduction; Barrett 1955:28-30, 32 n.1).

The Evangelist uses a Greek concept with first-century Judaeo-Christian stuffings, i.e. not as the Greeks would use it. "So it was that the treasures of Greece were made contributory to the full unfolding of the Gospel. But the essence of their doctrine has no affinity with [the Fourth Evangelist's]" (Westcott 1964:xviii). Westcott goes so far as to argue that the Evangelist's employment of the *Logos* "seems to shew clearly that the writer was of Palestinian and not of Hellenistic training" (1964:xv).

So the Evangelist draws from the OT, particularly the Wisdom tradition, Rabbinic Judaism, Apocalyptic and sectarian thought within Judaism - "but his use of it differs from that of other New

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[40] The Hellenistic world is some distance from the earlier classical Hellenic world. "The superb self-confidence of the fifth century B.C. had collapsed; rational thought had compromised with mysticism; eclecticism, both in philosophy and religion, was the order of the day" (Barrett 1955:28). For the Greeks, λόγος is "the principle of coherence undergirding the universe" (Browning 1996:230). Because it is understood as a rational creative principle, it is never hypostatized or designated as an independent deity itself. However "In the meaning of word or speech it can be less abstract... but in this case it is always associated with a particular deity or religious tradition" (DDD 1999:527; cf. Kittel 1967:75-76; Brown 1978:1119). "It stands in contrast to the 'Word' of the OT and NT. Naturally, concrete utterance is part of its content....But there is implied the connected rational element in speech, which seeks to discover the issue itself in the demonstration, as distinct from the harmony and beauty of sound, for which the Greek uses ἔπος or ῥῆμα, and especially in contrast to ῥῆμα as the individual and more emotional expression or saying, though this does, of course, fall into a pattern, so that the fact of speech is the essential thing, and ῥῆμα thus denotes the word as expressed will, as distinct from the explicatory element in λόγος" (Kittel 1967:79-80).

Testament writers, and is far from simple" (Barrett 1955:22; cf. *idem* 1955:26-27; Brown 1966:introduction; Westcott 1964:vii, lxix; Bultmann 1971:22-23; Dodd 1953:272). But, as Hoskyns admonishes, although the texture of the Prologue is taken from the OT Scriptures, the Prologue nonetheless "is altogether Christian" (1947:137).[41]

3.2.3 *But Why 'Logos'?*

The Evangelist certainly knew of the Greek baggage overwhelming this word. Moreover it might have been easier for him to choose Wisdom or Torah. The *Wisdom* of Jewish Wisdom Literature has even more parallels with the *Logos* of John's Prologue (Brown 1966:522-3). *Torah* speculation (particularly of rabbinical writings although significant parallels can be found even in the Hebrew Bible) ascribes to the Torah features similar to those of the Prologue's *Logos*. On the contrary, as Richardson notes (1959:39), John never uses *Sophia* at all; and Paul, who never equates Christ with the Word of God, readily describes Christ as the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24,30; Col 2:3). From this observation Haenchen (1980:102) suggests that the Evangelist "needed to substitute the masculine Logos for the feminine Wisdom in order to create a coherent poem" - 'coherent,' that is, with the gender of Jesus Christ. I find this suggestion to be as plausible as it is mechanically simplistic.

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[41] Craig Evans recently wrote a book intended to elucidate among other things "the interpretive background of the Johannine Prologue" and "the provenance of the Fourth Gospel itself" (1993:9). After investigating Gnostic and Hermetic Parallels, Biblical Parallels, Jewish Parallels and several other first-century 'sects,' Evans concludes that "the principal background against which the Johannine Prologue should be read is that of the Old Testament and various first-century interpretations and speculations relating to it. The context or provenance of the Prologue is the synagogue of the Diaspora....Gnostic myths of a redeemed redeemer evidently originated in the second and third centuries, borrowing freely from Judaism, Christianity and passages from the Old and New Testaments" (1993:199) including John's Prologue.

It would appear that the Evangelist found in his environment a dynamic term that could lend itself to the various applications which he intended, a word that he could trace in all the important schools of his day (including Judaism), and yet a word that he could fill with his own content. The Prologue's *Logos* is so familiar and yet so uniquely Johannine! For one thing it is not 'the Word of God' (so Hoskyns 1947:137-141; Dodd 1953:294) but simply 'the Word' (so Tasker 1960:44 and Bultmann 1971:21) or the Word with God, God himself. In the beginning was, neither the Law nor Reason nor Wisdom - in the beginning was the Word. The prime and primal mode of God's revelation was the Word, the others followed on.

3.3 Does *Lentswe* Translate the *Logos*?

> When Faust begins to translate the NT into German, he starts with the Prologue, only to find that "Word" is an inadequate translation....At the end, enlightened by the spirit, Faust triumphantly proclaims the real translation: "In the beginning was the Act [*die Tat*]." Modern investigations into the background of the Johannine use of "the Word" are as varied, if not as romantic (Brown 1966:519).

On the basis of my convictions regarding indigenous access to source materials (see Figure 1), I do not find the question 'Does *Lentswe* translate the *Logos*?' misguided. Notwithstanding the reality that *Lentswe* boasts much theological or spiritual dynamic among the Basotho, the question is still not irrelevant.

The similarities between John's *Logos* and Sesotho's *Lentswe* are evident from the preceding accounts. Both are not abstract entities. Both point beyond themselves to the communicator. It is

always somebody's *Lentswe*, directed at somebody or something in order to achieve some result. Even the "absolute, unrelated ὁ λόγος" unique to the Prologue is qualified by an association with God (πρὸς τὸν θεόν) twice in the first two verses (Kittel 1967:126-32). By this association the Evangelist "wishes to rule out the Hellenistic notion of *sophia* or the Stoic notion of the immanent *logos* as a kind of second god....Christ is not other than God" (Richardson 1959:39 cf.. Kittel 1967:90, 102; Achtemeier 1996:619; Brown 1978:1114; Walls 1992:31-32). So, it appears, that *Lentswe* is the closest we could get to the *Logos* of John's Prologue. Moreover a personal *Lentswe* is not foreign to Sesotho.

Chapter 4

JOHN 1:1-18: THE EXEGESIS

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Lenstwe le ne le le tshimolohong, mme Lentswe le ne le le ho Modimo, mme Lentswe e ne e le Modimo. 2 Le ne le le ho Modimo tshimolohong. 3 Dintho tsohle di entswe ke lona, mme hara dintho tse leng teng, ha ho letho le entsweng kantle ho lona. 4 Bophelo bo ne bo le ho lona, mme bophelo e ne e le lesedi la batho. 5 Mme lesedi le kganya lefifing, mme lefifi ha le a ka la le amohela.

6 Monna a hlaha, a romilwe ke Modimo, lebitso la hae *e le* Johanne. 7 Eo a tla ho ba paki, hore a pake tsa lesedi, bohle ba tle ba dumele ka yena. 8 E ne e se yena lesedi, *empa o ne a romilwe* hore a tle ho paka tsa lesedi.

9 E ne e le lona lesedi la nnete, le bonesetsang motho e mong le e mong ya hlahang lefatsheng. 10 Le ne le le lefatsheng, mme lefatshe le hlahile ka lona, mme lefatshe ha le a ka la le tseba. 11 Le ne le tle habo lona, mme ba habo lona ha ba ka ba le amohela. 12 Empa bohle ba le amohetseng, le ba neile tokelo ya ho ba bana ba Modimo, e leng ba dumelang lebitso la lona; 13 ba sa kang ba tswalwa ke madi, leha e le ka ho rata ha nama, leha e le ka ho rata ha monna, ba mpa ba tswetswe ke Modimo.

14 Lentswe le ne le etswe nama, mme la aha hara rona le tletse mohau le nnete, mme re bohile kganya ya lona, e kang kganya ya Mora a nnotshi ya *tswang* ho Ntate. 15 Johanne o mo pakile; a phahamisa lentswe, a re: Ke yena eo ke neng ke mmolela, ha ke re: Ya tlang kamorao ho nna, o moholo ho nna, kahobane a ne a le pele ho nna.

16 Mme re amohetse bohle mohau hodima mohau, ho ho tletseng ho yena. 17 Hobane molao o neilwe ka Moshe, mohau le nnete di hlahisitswe ka Jesu Kreste. 18 Modimo ha o a ka wa bonwa ke motho le ka mohla o le mong; Mora a nnotshi, ya sefubeng sa Ntate, ke yena ya re tsebisitseng *wona.*

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Tshimolohong Lentswe le ne le le teng. Lentswe le ne le le ho Modimo, mme lentswe e ne e le Modimo. 2 Le ne le le ho Modimo tshimolohong.

3 Dintho tsohle di bile teng ka lona, mme ha ho letho le bileng teng haese ka lona. 4 Bophelo bo ne bo le ka ho lona, mme bophelo e ne e le lesedi la batho; 5 lesedi le kganya lefifing, empa lefifi ha le a ka la le hlola.

6 Monna o ne a le teng, ya romilweng ke Modimo, lebitso la hae e le Johanne. 7 Monna enwa a tlela ho paka tsa lesedi, e le hore bohle ba dumele ka yena. 8 Yena a ne e se lesedi leo, empa o ne a tlile hore a pake tsa lesedi. 9 Lesedi la nnete le bonesetsang motho e mong le e mong, le ne le etla lefatsheng.

10 Lentswe le ne le le lefatsheng, mme lefatshe le bile teng ka lona, empa lefatshe ha le a ka la le tseba. 11 Le ne le tlile hahabo lona, empa ba habo lona ha ba ka ba le amohela. 12 Empa bohle ba le amohetseng, e leng ba dumelang ho lona, le ba neile tokelo ya ho fetoha bana ba Modimo, 13 ba sa kang ba tswalwa ka madi, kapa ka thato ya nama, kapa ka thato ya monna, empa ba tswetswe ke Modimo.

14 Lentswe ya eba motho, la aha hara rona, mme ra bona tlotla ya lona, e tletseng mohau le nnete, tlotla e kang eo Mora ya tswetsweng a nnotshi a e fumaneng ho Ntate.

15 Johanne o mo pakile, mme a howa, a re: "Enwa ke yena, eo ke neng ke mmolela, ha ke re: 'Ya tlang kamorao ho nna o mpheta ka boholo, hobane o bile teng pele ho nna.'" 16 Mohaung wa hae o kgapatsehang rona bohle re amohetse mohau hodima mohau, 17 hobanne molao o neilwe batho ka Moshe, empa mohau le nnete di bile teng ka Jesu Kreste. 18 Ha ho ya kileng a bona Modimo le ka mohla; Mora ya tswetsweng a nnotshi, eo e leng Modimo, ya leng sefubeng sa Ntate, ke yena ya re tsebisitseng Modimo.

N1986

Mathomong e a bego a le gona ke yena LENTŠU. Gomme yena LENTŠU o be a le go Modimo. Gomme yena LENTŠU e be e le Modimo. 2 Ke yena a bego a le gona mathomong. 3 Tšohle di dirilwe ke yena; mme go tše di dirilwego ga go se se sa kago sa dirwa ke yena. 4 Bophelo bo be bo le mo go yena; mme bophelo bjoo e be e le lesedi la batho. 5 Mme seetša seo se bonega leswiswing; fela, leswiswi ga la ka la se amogela.

6 Go kile ga tšwelela motho, e a romilwego ke Modimo; leina la gagwe ke Johane. 7 O be a tlile go ba hlatse, a hlatsela seetša, gore batho ba dumele ka yena. 8 E be e se yena seetša; se a se tletšego e be e le gore a be hlatse ya sona seetša. 9 Seetšaetša sa go bonegela batho bohle ke yena Motlafaseng.

10 O be a le gona lefaseng, mme lefase le dirilwe ke yena; gomme lefase ga la ka la mo tseba. 11 A tla go tša gagwe; mme ba gagwe ga ba ka ba mo amogela. 12 Fela, bohle ba ba mo amogetšego o ba neile maatla a go ba bana ba Modimo. Ke bao ba go dumela leina la gagwe. 13 Ke bao ba sa kago ba tswalwa ka madi le ka nama le ka thato ya monna; ke bao ba go tswalwa ke Modimo.

14 Mme yena LENTŠU a ba nama, a tla a aga le rena; ra bogela letago la gagwe, letago la Motswalwaeši wa Tatagwe, Motlalakgaugeloletherešo.

15 Johane o mo hlatsela a goelela a re: Ke yena yo ke mmoletšego a re: E a tla ntlhatlamago, ke e a bego a nthakile pele gobane o be a le gona, nna ke sešo ka ba gona.

16 Gomme mo go botlalo bja gagwe ke mo rena re amogetšego kgaugelo ka go gaugelwa. 17 Gobane molao, batho ba o neilwe ka Moshe; ge e le kgaugelo le therešo ke tša go ba gona ka Jesu Kriste. 18 Ga go e a bilego a bona Modimo le neng, wa go re bea seetšeng ke yena Morwamotswalwaeši, e a lego difarong tša Tatagwe.

N1997

Pele ga ge lefase le hlolwa, Lentšu o be a ntše a le gona, a le go Modimo, e bile ka boyena e le Modimo. 2 E sa le a e ba go Modimo go tloga le go tloga. 3 Tšohle di hlodilwe ka yena, gomme go tše di hlodilwego, ga go le se tee se se sego sa hlolwa ka yena. 4 Dihlolwa tšohle di hweditše bophelo ka yena, bophelo bjo e bilego seedi sa batho. 5 Seedi seo se bonega leswiswing, gomme leswiswi ga se la kgona go se fenya.

6 Modimo o kile a roma monna yo mongwe yo leina la gagwe e bego e le Johanese. 7 O be a tlile go begela batho seedi, gore bohle ba kwe se a se begago gomme ba se dumele. 8 Yena ka boyena e be e se seedi; se a bego a se tletše e be e le go bega seedi. 9 Seediedi sa go bonegela batho bohle se be se etla lefaseng.

10 Lentšu o be a le lefaseng, gomme le ge Modimo a hlodile lefase ka yena, batho ba lona ga se ba mo amogela. 11 O be a tlile ga gabo, fela ba gabo ba se mo amogele. 12 Eupša ba ba ilego ba mo amogela mme ba dumela go yena, bona a ba fa tokelo ya go ba bana ba Modimo. 13 Ya ba bana ba Modimo, e sego ka go tswalwa bjalo ka bana ba bangwe, e sego ka go tswalwa ka tumo ya nama, go ba ka thato ya monna, eupša ka go tswalwa ke Modimo ka boyena.

14 Yena Lentšu e bile motho, a dula le rena e le yo botho kudu go rena, a re utollela ka botlalo se Modimo a lego sona. Ra bogela letago la gagwe, letago le a le filwego ke Tatagwe, e le yena Morwa a nnoši wa Tatagwe.

15 Johanese o be a bolela ka yena mola a goeletša, a re: "Ke be ke era yena yo ge ke be ke re: 'Yo a ntlhatlamago o mpheta ka maemo, ka gobane o be a le gona pele nna ke tswalwa.'"

16 Ka ge a re loketše kudu, o re šegofaditše bohle, a re šegofatša leboelela. 17 Melao Modimo o re file yona ka Moshe, gomme ka Jesu Kriste a re utollela ka mo e lego yo botho go rena ka gona, a ba a re utollela se a lego sona. 18 Ga go motho yo a kilego a bona Modimo. Batho ba mo tseba ka go mo utollelwa ke Morwagwe, Motswalwanoši, yo ka boyena e lego Modimo, yo a lego kgauswi le Tatagwe.

4.1 The Sesotho Versions Used

> In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son... (Hebrews 1:1f RSV).

Two Southern and two Northern Sotho versions of the Bible are here studied side-by-side in order to elicit the meanings they purport or are designed to produce among their readers. The Southern Sotho versions are *Bibele e Halalelang* (1987) and *Bibele: Phetolelo e Ntjha* (1989). That is "The Holy Bible" and "The Bible: A New Translation" respectively (hereinafter referred to as 'S1987' and 'S1989').[42]

The Northern Sotho versions are *Bibele: Ya Mangwalo a Makgethwa a Testamente ye Tala le a Testamente ye Mpsha* (1986) and the Bible portion *Ebangedi ya Jesu Kreste go ya ka Johanese* (1997, the complete Bible of this version has just been launched late in 2000). That is "The Bible: Of the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament and of the New Testament" and "The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to John" respectively (hereinafter 'N1986' and 'N1997').

I am not interested in the 'denominational' backgrounds of these versions. This is because such origins are not acknowledged by the texts that the masses have, and conversely the masses do not read them with such interests (or awareness) in mind. Moreover, all these Sesotho versions come from the BSSA and must thus be taken in good faith as being non-partisan.

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[42] There are other earlier 'versions' of the Bible in Sesotho that are not employed here. This is because (i) the ones here employed are current, (ii) generally, differences between current and earlier versions pertain to orthography and/or spelling rather than to meaning or sense. For instance, the 1898 BFBS version of the Sesotho NT is identical with the (1961) 1987 version except that the 1898 version is in the older orthography. The same evolutionary history can be shown with the other participants.

The four versions are one in rendering verses 1-18 a separate section, a feature they owe to their translators' theological awareness. However it is interesting that they give this section different headings, viz. *Lentswe le entsweng nama* (S1987, "The Word that has been [was] made flesh"), *Lentswe le fetoha motho* (S1989, "The Word becomes [turns into] a person"), *Kriste ke Modimo* (N1986, "Christ is God"), and *Lentšu ke Kriste* (N1997, "The Word is [the] Christ") - this feature they owe to their translators' theological predispositions.

Regardless of how much they reveal of the translators' theological dispositions, the captions are of no particular relevance here since, strictly speaking, they are not part of the text. We must note, nonetheless, that most readers of the text are influenced by whether the title reads "*The Word that has been (was) made flesh*" or "*The Word becomes a person*" or "*Christ is God.*" For one thing the Word is passive in S1987, active in S1989, and in the realm of the physical historical world. Divergent interpretations of verse 14 (Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο...) seem to be responsible for these different titles, betraying its key status to the Southern Sotho translators. The Word is the Christ in both N1986 and N1997 although N1986 is concerned to emphasize that this Christ is no less than God Himself. The Northern Sotho translators are anxious to elucidate the relationship between the Word, the Christ and God. All this indoctrination even before the reader engages the author's text!

Clearly then, the comparison of these four versions raises issues that would not arise were I to study one version at a time. Since there are no known precedents in the Sesotho connection, this wider reach is desirable. But our comparison is intended to appreciate the struggles and choices of the translators and the implications of these choices, rather than merely seeking to grade the versions.

Another illustration of the usefulness of this comparative study is found in the body of the Prologue's text. The Northern Sotho versions employ a *personal pronoun* for *Lentšu* throughout the Prologue unlike the Southern Sotho versions which employ an *impersonal pronoun* for *Lentswe*. This is in keeping with the reverent Northen Sotho titles of the pericope. That *Logos* is never used of the word-become-flesh outside the Prologue means that this comparison cannot be carried through the whole evangelical narrative. However, the tension encountered here between the Southern and Northern Sotho versions has far-reaching implications. For the Southern Sotho reader *Lentswe* is dependent and impersonal while for the Northern Sotho reader *Lentšu* is personal and stands in a class all by Himself, as the Christ.

4.2 Composition or Liturgy?

Every treatment of John's Gospel recognizes 1:1-18 as an important vista into the Gospel. They may differ on how to subdivide it (see Haenchen 1980:78f,122; Schnackenburg 1968:221-4) and such other issues as are betrayed by the following inconclusive (somewhat approximating Schnackenburg's "theological opening narrative" [1968:224]) citation:

> The so-called Prologue is therefore neither an introduction aimed at the hellenistic reader (cf.. Harnack and Dodd), nor is it a summary of the Gospel (cf.. Hoskyn and Schlier), nor is it an overture that serves as a prelude to emphasize various motifs from the Gospel and thus confirms the reader (cf.. Heitmüller and Bultmann). Instead it depicts the history of salvation from its beginning in eternity to the earthly work of Jesus (Haenchen 1980:139-40 sic).

Some scholars have conjectured an Aramaic original hymn (e.g. Bultmann 1971:18, there also see reference to C F Burney 1922) while others are content to see the hymn in the Greek mss we have (e.g. Brown 1966:CXXX). Most of these who accept the hymn find interpolations in this hymn, but others do not. Bernard's summary of the issues is concise and hardly surpassable (1928:cxxxvii-cxlvii; see also Brown 1966:21-23; Schnackenburg 1968:225-32; Haenchen 1980:125), particularly since later scholars generally follow one or the other of the options he discusses. While Bultmann (1971:14) sees in the Prologue "cultic-liturgical poetry, oscillating between the language of revelation and confession," Barrett sees neither the hymn nor interpolations (1955:126-7).

The question arises whether the Sesotho reading affirms our participation in these debates. I must note that the Sesotho versions employed in this study easily read rhythmically, making it easy to memorize the passage with the minimum effort of a few recitations. There is no metre and so the hurried lines vary in length, as long as the message is carried across.[43] The typical Hebraic parallelism is detected throughout the Prologue where words which end one sentence begin the next (cf. Bernard 1928:cxlv; Brown 1966:CXXXII; etc.).

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[43] Basotho composed *dithoko* (Nguni *izibongo*) for or during various occasions. These include the excellent reign of a king, victory in battle, circumcision, and recording of a clan's exploits. Every circumcision 'graduate' would recite *dithoko* articulating his background and warriorship. Kings have *diroki* (Nguni, *izimbongi*) going out ahead of them reciting the chief's personal achievements as well as his clan's exploits. Since reference to other clans is never lacking, this recording of a clan's history by means of *dithoko* has the perennial value of guiding the member of one clan in his relations with those of other clans. He would know which clans he may marry from, and to which to show kindness or severity, depending on their treatment of his own clan in the past. The *thoko* of John's Prologue resembles Sesotho praise-poems in (i) having a subject, a hero, (ii) ascribing preeminence to its subject, (iii) focusing on *Lentswe* throughout though not failing to highlight those who acted as aides or aggressors, (iv) revealing the subject's background and exploits and/or uniqueness, (v) ascribing other excellent descriptive and metaphorical qualities to the subject (e.g. the Word as the light of the people), (vi) employing deverbative eulogues, e.g. N1986's *Motlafaseng* (v9), *Motlalakgaugelolethereŝo* (v14), and *Morwamotswalwaeŝi* (v18) (cf.. Damane & Sanders 1974:42; Kunene 1971).

But for the present purposes, basically because Sesotho poetry is not a field that I am well-acquainted with, it will suffice to note that the Prologue is the Evangelist's work though he certainly drew upon what his broader community was acquainted with (cf. Westcott 1964:xv; Bultmann 1971:14-18). In fact, there is hardly ever a work that does not draw upon some other influence, especially one of a similar nature to the work itself.

> The prologue is a closeknit unity. When seen as a spiralling three-part summary of the history of salvation and of the descent of the Word, its many elements blend together. The figure of John [the Baptizer], often regarded as alien to the prologue, culminates and embodies the OT, and as such has an integral role in this unique summary (Brodie 1993:145).

So, in spite of underlying influences, the Prologue must be treated as the Evangelist's composition. Explanatory notes have been observed elsewhere in the Gospel (e.g. Brown 1966:CXXXVI), but their presence does not diminish the Evangelist's authorship or composing of the Gospel.

Writing to an audience that understood what he meant by the *Logos* means that the Evangelist took some things for granted. But this becomes a problem when the translation's target audience may not see the same things as the author's community did. Although *Lentswe* is in no way inferior to *Logos*, the truth is that *Lentswe* does not have the same nuances as the *Logos* did in the Hellenistic world. So the Mosotho translator-exegete still faces the problem of how and how far to 'explain' the intended allusions. This will be seen to differing degrees as we engage the Sesotho text of John's Prologue.

4.3 The Sesotho Commentary

The present commentary is not *expository* despite persistent temptation to the contrary. It does not seek to derive a coherent doctrine of the *Logos* or of the Evangelist's *Christology*, etc. This is because I am not at the stage in theological development where I could produce such a work. Moreover, the present study investigates only the Prologue and can therefore not claim to say anything regarding the whole Gospel's teaching (cf. Bultmann 1971:20).

Rather, it is *exegetical*. It seeks to bare the meanings intimated by the various constructions of the texts. Even while doing this, I shall pay attention to those aspects of the Sesotho text that are worth commenting on from the Sesotho perspective. The full text of the Sesotho Prologues is already provided, however I shall where necessary give exact citations for easy comparison within the commentary. In places where the versions are accordant, I shall only give the English equivalent.

Verses 1-2 :- S1987 foregrounds *Lentswe*, thereby disregarding the order of the Greek text and obscuring the legendary tradition implicit here. It is interesting that S1987 supplants this resonance by *not* opening the Gospel as it opens the Genesis account. S1989, N1986 and N1997, on the other hand, begin with 'in the beginning' thus foregrounding the setting from which to understand *Lentswe*. They also immediately recall Genesis 1:1 to the Christian reader's mind.[44] The desired effect (common also in the mythology of Sesotho folk-tales) of transporting the reader to the immeasurable

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[44] Genesis 1:1-2 of the LXX and the Greek text of John 1:1-2 have the same feel to them, something the Evangelist must have intended. In fact some already cited observers (e.g. Leeming & Page, n40) see the Evangelist's as the 'Christian version' of the creation story. Several modifications are observable, e.g. the Evangelist's 'beginning' is not the moment of creation as in Genesis, it goes beyond that beginning into pre-temporal eternity.

past is adequately achieved by the three versions. At the same time the stage is set for tension between that immeasurable past (John 1:1-2) and the moment of creation (John 1:3; Genesis 1:1); and between the author's present (John 20:30-31) and another more recent past, the Incarnation (John 1:14).

The imperfect ἦν is very well-represented in all the four versions. That is to say, the sense of the *Logos having always been there* before 'the beginning' (as opposed to 'coming into being' [ἐγένετο] at the beginning) is preserved by the Sesotho versions. Schnackenburg calls it the believer's version of Christ's 'before Abraham was, I am' (1968:233).

The only unexpected oddness is the omission by N1986 of πρὸς τὸν θεόν in the repetitious verse 2. This is significant if we appreciate that Nestle-Aland does not note any textual variants at this point. The only apparent explanation is that N1986 is intent to emphasize the divinity of the *Logos* (cf. N1986's title for the Prologue). N1986 thus deprives the reader of the Evangelist's intentions when sandwiching θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (the Word was God) between two πρὸς τὸν θεόν's. That is, either to reiterate the "fact that the relationship with Deity implied in πρὸς τὸν θεόν was eternal; it too was 'in the beginning'" (Bernard 1928:3; so also Barrett 1955:130), or to check the extremism that might result from θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος (Bultmann 1971:33-34).[45]

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[45] The rules of complement in Greek grammar require that if two nouns are governed by a verb of incomplete predication, the nouns shall be in the same case and the 'complement' shall not have the article. It thus becomes unnecessary (as does, among others, Haenchen 1980:109-11) to understand a contrast in v1 between 'the only God' (ὁ θεός) and 'a god'/'a divinity' (θεός which 'at the time approximated θεῖος').

Verse 3 :- ἐγένετο here contrasts ἦν of vv1-2, i.e. all things 'came into being' at some point in time as opposed to the *Logos* and God who 'were always there.' All four versions (in tandem with scholarship) uphold this crucial contrast. But ἐγένετο is here used of 'things' rather than of persons exclusively (cf. v6), therefore it is best captured in the passive voice.[46] So S1987 (*di entswe*), N1986 (*di dirilwe*) and N1997 (*di hlodilwe*) mean 'were made/created' *contra* S1989 whose (*di bile teng*) 'came into being' is non-committal.

The Greek phrase δι᾽ αὐτοῦ can mean 'by means of' (instrumental use, i.e. of non-living things) or 'by the agency of' (i.e. when the cause is a living being). Since the Northern Sotho versions understand *Lentšu* in personal terms, I would expect them to render *Lentšu* the 'maker' by using *ke*. Similarly since the Southern Sotho versions employ an impersonal pronoun for *Lentswe*, I would expect them to use *ka* thus rendering *Lentswe* the 'instrument' through which 'everything was created that was created.'[47]

But this is not the case. It is only N1986 that satisfies my expectations. N1997 employs *ka* thus prima facie implying that *Lentswe* was the 'instrument.' S1987 insists that *Lentswe* was the maker by

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[46] Bernard (1928:3), Barrett (1955:130), Tasker (1960:45), and Dodd (1953:269) among others, are concerned to emphasize the connection of the *Logos* with creation as its creator - 'through' for them is agentive. Brown (1966:25-26) first summarizes the debate over whether the Logos' creation is "efficient or exemplary causality." But he is concerned to equate the Logos with the Father in order to avoid a connection with the Gnostic demiurge who creates the material world. So he concludes that "the Father may be said to create through the Word. Thus the material world has been created by God and is good." Bultmann (1971:37-38) is equally concerned to maintain 'the unity of creation' - the world, as God's creation, is also God's revelation just like the Logos. 'Through' thus seems to be not as troublesome as the Sesotho prepositions, in fact it seems synonymous with 'by' when the verb is passive.

[47] (i) All the Sesotho versions ignore the variant reading in which 'that was made' is taken with v4; (ii) in 1 Cor 8:6 Paul suggests that 'God the Father' is the source of all things while 'the Lord Jesus Christ' is the actual creator; (iii) all Sesotho versions translate Psalm 33:6 in the instrumental sense.

unambiguously using *ke*, thereby disregarding the expectations raised by the impersonal pronoun used for the *Logos*. S1989 is very ambiguous - it can literally go this or that way. This turns out to be a lot more complicated than I thought. But the Baptizer, among others, has claimed the role of an instrument when he called himself 'the voice of' someone else. When a person is used of God, it is often appropriate to preserve the sense of the One working behind the scenes through the person (e.g. Acts 2:43). But there is no justification not to translate this verse clearly in Sesotho; *Lentswe/Lentšu* clearly is the Creator.

Verse 4 :- N1997 best illustrates its freedom in this verse.[48] It opens 'All creatures received life through him....' while all the others read 'Life was in him/it.' Probably attempting to translate ἐν, S1989 uses *ka ho* while S1987 and N1986 simply use *ho*. *Ka ho* approximates 'within' (locative). *Ho* alone simply denotes that *Lentswe* possessed life diffusely and therefore this life can be derived from *Lentswe*, not from some part of *Lentswe*.[49]

There is a textual variant in the Greek text where some witnesses prefer 'is' (ἐστιν) instead of 'was' (ἦν) in the phrase 'in him was/is life.' (Another weak variant reading raises 'philosophical' possibilities by omitting *la batho*, i.e. τῶν ἀνθρώπων.) In this context, both 'is' and 'was' mean to

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[48] The dialectic between preservation of the form and style of the original (formal correspondence) and the freedom to capture the sense of the original in the best phraseologies of the target language (dynamic equivalence) remains very real, for the translator as well as for the reader. In my church circles, for example, the Good News Version of the English Bible and other paraphrased versions are not popular because they do not sound 'authentic' enough - reference here is to "the traditional biblical language" (Porter 1999:21) that the KJV has urged upon English readers of the Bible.

[49] Throughout the Prologue, one wonders if the Evangelist is not being as 'loose' as the Apostle (1 John 1:5-7). In the Epistle God *is* Light (v5) and is *in* the Light (v7). In the Prologue the Word is *with* God and yet it *is* God (v1); the life in the Word was the light of the people (v4), John came to bear witness to the true light (vv7-8) which was (coming) in the world (vv9-10) and which the world failed to recognize....

emphasize the fact that *Lentswe* possesses life *ceaselessly*. Those who opt for 'was' seek to

emphasize that *Lentswe* always possessed life just as he always has been there. He did not receive life

at the beginning. Those who prefer 'is' want to emphasize that he now still possesses the life he

always had with himself from before the beginning. (In view of v5 where the present tense is followed

by the past tense, the case for ἐστιν is somewhat strengthened.) The Sesotho versions all go with the

imperfect ἦν. To capture both senses in Sesotho is easier in Northern Sotho - *bophelo bo dutše bo*

le mo go yena (life has always been and still is with/in him). In Southern Sotho the best way is with

the present continuous tense (*bophelo bo ho lona*).

Verse 5 :- Here the only thing worthy of note from the Sesotho versions is the translation of

κατέλαβεν. S1987 and N1986 render it 'received' (*amohela* and *amogela*) while S1989 and N1997

give 'overcome' (*hlola* and *fenya*). The implications of each choice are evident. But the divergence

reflects genuine struggles of the translators to engage both the immediate context and the wider

Christian context.

Καταλαμβάνω itself is part of the problem. Liddell & Scott render the active sense as (A) to seize,

lay hold of, overpower, apprehend or comprehend (B) to catch, overtake, befall or surprise (C) to

repress, arrest, check, bind, force or compel.[50] The Sesotho word that approximates it is

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[50] Arndt & Gingrich also have the same rage of meanings: 1a. *seize, win, attain*, b. *seize with hostile intent*, c. *catch, detect*; 2. Middle - *grasp, find, understand*. They prefer 'grasp' for the translation of this verse advancing the defence: "in which case *grasp* easily passes over to the sense *comprehend*" (1957:413-4). Brown (1966:8,27) sees in this aorist verb a reference to the Fall as an unsuccessful historic attempt by the darkness to overcome the light. Bernard (1928:6-7) is content with 'overcome.' Bultmann (1971:46-48) goes for 'understood' because of οὐκ ἔγνω and οὐκ παρέλαβον in vv10-11. Barrett (1955:132) contends that since the Greek word bears both meanings, the Evangelist is probably playing on both meanings, i.e. to say that "the darkness neither understood nor quenched the light." Schnackenburg favours 'grasp' in the sense of "embrace with mind and will" (1968:246). Clearly the contrast

tshwara/swara (*seize, arrest, check, overtake* and *be in possession of,* etc.) and the English equivalent

is *grasp* or *apprehend.* Like καταλαμβάνω, both the Sesotho and English words must always be

understood in context. Whereas the imperative *Tshwara*! means 'Catch!' or 'Take (hold of)!', the

modest *ha ke o tshware* is best translated 'I do not get you' or 'I do not follow.'

Φαίνει (which all the Sesotho versions duly render in the present tense) suggests that the light is

continuing to shine in the midst of the darkness (Brown 1966:7,27). Bultmann feels that it refers to

the revelation of the Word, i.e. the earthly ministry and what followed (1971:46; cf. Dodd 1953).

Barrett (1955:132) takes exception, "No particular manifestation of divine light is meant; it is as much

an eternal property of the Light to shine in the darkness as it is of the life to be the light of men, and

of the Word to have life in himself. The light cannot cease to do this without ceasing to be light."

Does the darkness not 'end' in spite of the light continuing to shine!(?)

κατέλαβεν is aorist and thus refers to an event in the past.[51] Now, the φαίνει sentence precedes

that of κατέλαβεν. If the sentences were in a consequential relationship, the sense would be:

'whatever transpired during the encounter between the light and the darkness at some point in history,

the light is still brilliant.' But as the sentences stand: 'the light is, as it has always been, shining; the

darkness once tried but could not καταλαμβάνω it.'

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is not so sharp.

    [51] "Does this aorist refer to a specific attempt of the darkness to overcome the light? Or is it a complexive aorist indicating that darkness is always trying to overcome light?" (Brown 1966:7-8)

The interest is on what the light does *amidst* the darkness, and on what the darkness cannot do *to* the light. The light needs the darkness in order to appear as the light, and so it does not exterminate the darkness. The darkness often tries to absorb (quench, overtake, outdo) the inconveniencing light, but it failed once and for all![52]

On the other hand, it might not be entirely out of place to leave it to the reader to struggle with the ambiguity by rendering κατέλαβεν as *tshwara* (grasp or apprehend). It is interesting that N1997 does not here attempt to make the verse less ambiguous. So my reading is not in favour of 'overcome' (S1989 and N1997), but 'received' (S1987 and N1986) is difficult to justify on the basis of the meaning of the word and the context of verse 5. How does darkness 'receive' light, i.e. harmoniously coexist with it? Moreover further appearances by the equally challenging παραλαμβάνω (v11) and λαμβάνω (v12 and v16) lay a better claim on 'received.'

Verse 6 :- S1987, S1989 and N1986 retain the feel of a Sesotho mythical narrative in their reference to the Baptizer by introducing him as the subject. N1997 resorts to a historical tone by making *Modimo* the subject and John the object. It must be significant that the Evangelist has employed ἐγένετο and not ἦν (vv1-2); he intends comparison with verse 3 so John is understood to belong with the rest of the created things. So it is desirable for this fact to be mirrored by our translations. In this spirit, S1987 and N1986 say the Baptizer *appeared*. But the Southern Sotho word for 'to

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[52] Bultmann's demythologized explanation (1971:47) does not overthrow these observations: "The σκοτία is not an autonomous power existing alongside the φῶς, but it is only because of the light that there is darkness at all....Yet the ζωή of the Logos does not cease to be the φῶς of men just because men have chosen the possibility of darkness. Rather it is only because the Logos is constantly present as the light of men that the world of men can be σκοτία at all. For darkness is...nothing other than the revolt against the light."

appear' (*ho hlaha*) also means 'to be born' while the Northern Sotho *go tšwelela* is unambiguous. S1989 does not heed this concern at all but uses the very phrase it used in verses 1 and 3 (*to be in existence*).

N1997, as we have already noted, restructures the whole sentence thus: *God once sent a certain man whose name was John*. Another possibly intended contrast is with verse 14 where ἐγένετο refers to the Incarnation of the *Logos*. Here, however, it is used with an 'object.' The deduction must be that John actually only came into existence when he became, whereas when the *Logos* became human he had always existed eternally.

We must also appreciate N1986's sobriety in correctly rendering ἄνθρωπος as 'person' (*motho*) instead of 'man' (*monna*) as the others do. Whereas in English 'man' may (still) be used generically, in Sesotho there is no warrant for that at all. The Baptizer is a man, but it is worth affirming in keeping with the Greek that he was a person. By reading person as in the Greek, we are also reminded that the Baptizer's task was not necessarily gender-specific.

Verse 7:- δι' αὐτοῦ rears its head up again. All versions understand it to mean that John came to facilitate the accession of all people to 'the faith.' That the facilitation is to be mediated *ka bopaki ba hae* (through his testimony) is understood. So he is the agent and his testimony is the tool he must deploy. In fact N1997 captures this rather overzealously: 'He had come to announce to the people the light, so that all might hear what he proclaims and then believe it.' I differ with N1997 with regard to the object of the people's faith. I see in the text the intention for them to believe, not the testimony,

but through it the light (so too, *inter alia*, Barrett 1955:133).

Verses 8-9 :- In all the Sesotho versions, the distinction between John and the true light (implicit in v7) is emphasized in these two verses. Verse 8 does so by first declaring that *that messenger* (ἐκεῖνος) was *not* the light, and then by explicating what he had *only* (ἀλλ᾽ ἵνα) come to do. It is as if the Evangelist perceived a possibility of someone confusing the Baptizer with the true light (as implied in vv19-28; so too Schanckenburg 1968:252 sees here an 'apologetic' against "over-estimators of the Baptist"). This explains the appositioning of the masculine demonstrative ἐκεῖνος with the neuter τὸ φῶς in a sentence that is easy to understand but very difficult to translate. This struggle is perceptible in the Sesotho versions under study. Oh that the Evangelist introduced the comparative ἀληθινόν in verse 8 already![53]

Verse 9 then picks up on *the true light* with a formula similar to that of verse 1 but without ἐν ἀρχῇ. Commentators have all been distressed by the Greek of this verse.[54] I think it should be rendered: 'The true light that lightens every person was always there, and was coming into the world' (in spite of the strong case for Rabbinic circumlocutory speech, cf. Tasker 1960:46; Barrett 1955:134; Brown

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[53] Most scholars feel that ἀληθινόν "denotes *real* as opposed to *counterfeit*, rather than *truthful* as opposed to *false*" (Tasker 1960:46; cf. Hoskyns 1947:145; Brown 1966:9,497; Bultmann 1971:52; Bernard 1928:11). But Barrett also sees the influence of popular Platonism of a reference to the "archetypal, ideal... of which others are mere copies" (1955:28) and "The Baptist might be supposed a light (indeed, in a sense he was a light, 5.35), but he was not τό ἀληθινόν φῶς.... ἀληθινός means 'real', 'genuine', 'authentic'" (1955:134).

[54] It is incredible that there have not, apparently, been textual variants. There are, as far as I can see, at least four senses (in their variable expressibility) in which the Greek might be rendered. These various ways have unique merits and demerits, but I can only list them here without much explanation: (i) He was the true light that lightens every person coming into the world (so S1987, KJV, NIV); (ii) The true light that lightens every person *was* coming into the world (so S1989, N1986, N1997); (iii) He was the true light that by coming into the world lightens every person; and (iv) He was the true light that lightens every person. Coming into the world, he was in the world, the world came into being through him, but the world did not know him.

1966:9-10; Schnackenburg 1968:254-5). There is an obvious allusion to verse 4 as well as a reference to verse 8, and a quick flowing into verse 10. This genuine light was always in the *Logos* and was the light of the people (v4). John was not this light, he only came to bear witness to it (vv7-8), but now it is coming into the world. This is precisely what John meant by "I am not he..." and "He who comes after me..." (1:19-34).

Verse 10 :- Like practically all commentators (e.g. Brown 1966:10,28; Barrett 1955:135; Bernard 1928:13; Bultmann 1971:54; Schnackenburg 1968:253), S1989 and N1997 provide 'the Word' as the subject of this verse. S1987 and N1986 employ the pronoun, and so evade committing themselves in favour of either 'the Light' or 'the Word.' The lack in the Greek text of an explicit subject is responsible for this confusion. Following on from the preceding verse, however, it seems logical that the subject of verse 10 is 'the Light.' If this is the case, it would mean that the Evangelist is not rigid in his usage of metaphors.[55]

But there is, in the Greek text, a masculine pronoun at the end of this verse. Its presence thus excludes 'the Light' (neuter gender) from being the subject and thus only leaves 'the Word' as a worthy candidate. However it might not be far-fetched to argue that although the Evangelist refers to his subject as the Light, he is simultaneously thinking in personal terms (so e.g. Dodd 1953:268-70). But perhaps there is wisdom in employing the pronoun, rather than explicitly stating 'the Word.'

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[55] This claim can easily be corroborated from the rest of the Gospel. Since he said in v4 that it was *the life* in the *Logos* that was *the light* of the people, we would not expect him to 'equate' the *Logos* with the light as he does in v9. Again since life was 'in him', we are supposed to be perturbed by his identification of Jesus and life in 11:25. And in 6:63 he says, "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (RSV).

Once again the liberty taken by N1997 is remarkable. It reads: *The Word was in the world, and although God created the world through him, the people of it (the world) did not receive him.* Several points of 'freedom' can be noted: (i) the introduction of *Modimo* (God) precludes the other possible sense of δι᾽ αὐτοῦ where it approximates 'by'; (ii) the phrase 'its people' harshly prejudices the Evangelist's ὁ κόσμος; (iii) the rendering of ἔγνω as 'receive' is difficult to explain. I am convinced that it is significant, for the Evangelist, that *the world* did not 'know' i.e. recognize him (v10), while *his own people* did not 'receive' him (v11).

Verse 11:- S1987, S1989 and N1997 all render the challenging τὰ ἴδια as 'his own home' (so Hoskyns 1947:146; Tasker 1960:47; Westcott 1964:vii; Bernard 1928:14; Barrett 1955:136). They then render οἱ ἴδιοι in the sense of 'those with whom he belongs.' It is clear that they added 'home' in order to prepare for the fact (implied in their translation of οἱ ἴδιοι) that 'he was their flesh and blood', and their home was his home. The rejection he suffered from them is of the worst kind - rejection by one's own family!

N1986 respects the gender of τὰ ἴδια and renders it 'his own things', preserving the obvious neuter meaning of 'possessions' (so Bultmann 1971:56; cf. Schnackenburg's 'his domain/realm'[1968:258-9]). It then translates οἱ ἴδιοι in the sense of 'those who belong to him,' thus preserving the idea of 'his own possessions.' The rejection he suffered from his own subjects (vassals) is incredible - rejection by those who find their identity in him. Instead of a royal reception as the giver of life (v4) and maker and possessor of 'all' (τὰ ἴδια is inclusive of οἱ ἴδιοι), all he got was at best a 'No thanks, we can get by without you.'

Verse 12:- This verse urges us to side with N1986's rendition of verse11. In keeping with his authority, he gave as many as received him (the way he was supposed to be received) the authority or power to become children of God. N1986 renders ἐξουσία as *maatla* (power) while N1997 follows S1987 and S1989 in using *tokelo* (right, legitimacy). Both *maatla* and *tokelo* are good translations of ἐξουσία, when the context is appropriate. In this instance I prefer *tokelo* (along with Barrett 1955:136; Bultmann 1971:57; Bernard 1928:16; and importantly Brown 1966:10-11) although verse 13 demands more than just legal rights.

But S1989 renders γενέσθαι as 'to metamorphose/turn into' (*ho fetoha*) instead of 'to be'/'to become' (*ho ba*) as do the others. To be given the right to turn into something (S1989) implies you can do it by yourself (permission). To be given the right to be or become something (S1987 and N1997) is to be set free. To be given power to be or become something (N1986) is to be empowered, to be enabled. *Ho fetoha* is rather strong since it places the onus on the believer. *Ho ba* preferably in combination with *tokelo* carry a sense of dependence on the source of the quality under consideration (compare elsewhere in this commentary where ἐγένετο is used of created things).

Verse 13:- (The textual variants of this verse and v15 are ignored since they may deter and clutter the present non-expository exercise.) Whereas it is acceptable in Southern Sotho, we do not in Northern Sotho speak respectfully when we say of people that *ba tswetšwe*. This word is reserved for the birth process of animals. *Batho ba a belegwa*, so I take exception to the route followed by N1986 and N1997 as a corruption of the people's language and values. If *tswalwa* cannot be used of natural human beings, how much more of persons begotten of God? One must use *belega* or, as

I do in my translation (chapter 6), simply understand ἐγεννήθησαν and then stress ἐκ θεοῦ.

Verse 14:- This important verse best demonstrates the diversity of the translations. σὰρξ has just been translated by all in verse 13 as *nama* (flesh). But in verse 14 it is rendered *motho* (person) by S1989 and N1997 while S1987 and N1986 retain *nama*. The reasons are simply theological.[56] The implicit presupposition that the Evangelist was incapable of discerning the awkwardness imposed by 'flesh' in its connection with the *Logos* is unfounded. The Evangelist, I think, intended to drive home the sense of the self-debasing *Logos*.[57] This sense of self-sacrifice is best captured by retaining the translation of the adjoining ἐγένετο in the active 'became' (S1989, N1986 and N1997) instead of the passive 'was made' (S1987). At any rate, the active sense is befitting of the uncreated *Logos*.

Appealing as the S1987 reading may be in its double-humility sense (the combination of 'was made' with 'flesh'), I am not convinced that the *Logos* should be stripped of its volition to become flesh. The force of the verse - the dialectic of the *Logos* being full of glory, grace and truth while simultaneously being among and like us people of flesh and blood - must not be compromised.

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[56] This is either a preoccupation with Paul's flesh-spirit 'dualism' or simply an endeavour to evade the inferiority of the flesh implicit in verse 13. Most commentators see here a repudiation of Docetism and Gnosticism (e.g. Bernard 1928:19-20; Haenchen 1980:119; Bultmann 1971:63f; Schnackenburg 1968:238-40). It is also interesting to note that N1986 gives *nama* here but *motho* in 1 John 4:2 and 2 John 7; S1987 retains *nama* while S1989 also retains *motho* throughout these other references. (I do not yet have access to the full Bible that corresponds to N1997.) Clearly reference is to the *Logos* having taken on human nature in its totality.

[57] Very much in the spirit of Phil. 2:5f where "though he was in the form of God,... (he) emptied himself, taking the form of a servant (or slave), being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he (still) humbled himself..." (RSV).

Moreover, since the *Logos* has already been declared God (v2), and since the Evangelist uses the tent-related ἐσκήνωσεν[58] (as opposed to a permanent building), it is safe to understand ἐγένετο as a temporary conscious undertaking rather than a permanent metamorphosis. This is plausible especially since at the time of the Evangelist's writing, the *Logos-become-flesh* was no longer physically on earth. But, to be sure, while on earth, the *Logos* was authentically human.

Whereas the other three take δόξαν with ὡς μονογενοῦς (i.e. glory as of the only begotten - N1986 omits 'as'), N1997, representative here of a minority of scholars who do the same, takes it with παρὰ πατρός (glory from the father). It is worth citing in full: *The Word himself did become a person, he stayed with us being very kind to us, he revealed to us fully who/what God is. We gazed at his glory, the glory he was given by his Father, being himself the only Son of his Father* (cf. Bernard 1928:23).

Verse 15:- This supposed interpolation (so hymnists such as Bernard; Schnackenburg; Bultmann; cf. Barrett 1955:140 for objections) does not raise many issues in Sesotho. I agree however that it is a parenthesis, one best put in brackets. Doing so would among other things, give space for the translation of ὅτι (with which v16 opens).

It is surprising that the RSV ignores ὅτι in spite of (a) bracketing verse 15 and (b) translating it in verse 17 where it opens the verse as well. It is interesting however that the Southern Sotho versions

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[58] I do not think that 'tabernacled' is here used primarily as a parallel of 'the Word become flesh' as Origen, Chrysostom, and Burkitt among others do (see Bernard 1928:20-21; cf.. Barrett 1955:138).

are henceforth employing the personal pronoun. I had hoped they would do so in verse 14 just after *Lentswe* becomes 'flesh.' So for the Southern Sotho reader *Lentswe* only becomes a person when the Baptizer says so (v15) but in verse 14, though human, he still is represented with the impersonal pronoun. This difficulty arises because the Greek pronoun for *Lentswe* and for 'person' is one and the same masculine ὁ, so the point at which a switch occurs in the author's mind is imperceptible. The all-important transition, for me, happens here and not at John's recognition.

All the versions understand the sentence governed by μαρτυρεῖ in the 'historic present,' except N1986 which renders it in the 'simple present.' Since the Evangelist evidently wrote long after the events he is narrating, the historic present tense is more appropriate, without necessarily implying that the testimony has since lost its significance. But the rendition of this μαρτυρεῖ is not fully intelligible in the Sesotho versions (except in the 'free' N1997 which renders it: *John was talking about him when he cried out, saying...*). The current renditions carry the following sense: *John went about backing him, raising his voice and saying....* This is not an incorrect understanding of μαρτυρεῖ, except the force of περί is compromised. Whereas John mostly spoke of the coming One - with a few opportunities to point him out - he never really had to attest to that One's deeds or claims (in fact Jesus says only God reserves this prerogative, John 5:30-38).

The author's sense, so far as I can see, particularly if we (contrary to some significant ancient authorities but along with Nestle-Aland) accept the awkward *this was the one (of) whom I said*, is that John the Baptizer 'pointed him out' as you would in a court of law. The intention is to assert that the Baptizer left no-one in doubt as to the identity of the 'Word that has become flesh.' If my

perception is correct then a possible verb in Sesotho to convey this sense is *supa* (point at) perhaps alongside *paka* (witness).

Verse 16:- ὅτι opens this verse in the Greek but only N1997 (so too Schnackenburg 1968:275; Haenchen 1980:120) acknowledges this while all the others go with the variant καὶ (so too Bultmann 1971:76). But, again, N1997's 'dynamism' is rather excessive: *Because he was so good to us, he has blessed us all, blessing us over and over again*. Because verse 14 ends with 'full of grace and truth' then verse 16 should connect thus: '*(we know) because from his fullness we all have received grace upon grace.*' Otherwise 'the fulness' (v16) has no referent! The Sesotho versions should translate ὅτι just as they do in verse 17.

Verse 17:- Here, except for the innocuous addition of 'people' as object of ἐδόθη (S1989 and N1986), S1987, S1989 and N1986 are basically faithful to the Greek and simultaneously straightforward in the ears of a Mosotho. This is so particularly because they preserve the connection with verses 14 and 16 elicited by the repetition of 'grace and truth' (contra N1997). They also remain consistent in the translation of ἐγένετο in relation to the *Logos*. As in verse 3, the *Logos* is the source but others, including Moses, are mere instruments.

Again N1997 defies conformity: *As for laws God gave them to us through Moses, but through Jesus Christ he revealed to us how kind/humane (botho) he is to us, he also revealed to us who/what he is*. The plural ('laws') is baffling since the Greek is not only singular but has a definite article too. The point intended by N1997 is, perhaps, that the shadows of the *laws* of Moses (perhaps 'the Decalogue

and Pentateuch') have been done away with by Jesus Christ, the Revealer of God's true nature.

Verse 18:- Those, like Haenchen, who argue that θεός without an article (as in 1:1) must be rendered 'divine' or 'god' but not 'God' (1980:109), must here too struggle with the absence of the article (1980:121,129) as opposed to the silence displayed by most of the commentators. No comment is called for since the Sesotho translations are oblivious to Haenchen's concerns. They all unambiguously render θεός as *Modimo*.

The last sentence of this verse has no direct object, yet the Sesotho versions, along with the weak variant reading, explicate the indirect object 'to us' (S1987, S1989 and N1986) while N1997 introduces 'people'. I am not convinced that the absence of the direct object is ambiguous when carried over into Sesotho. We have already demonstrated that the Basotho are not incapable of abstract thinking.

The biggest contention in this verse is with the expression μονογενὴς θεός. The distress is because of the apposition in the same case of 'only-begotten' (or 'beloved' or 'unique') and 'God.' It is theologically incorrect to speak of 'the only begotten God.' The one option is to substitute υιος (son) for θεός. This option enjoys majority support, but υιός does not feature in the Prologue at all! The other option is to alter the case of θεός from the nominative to the genitive θεοῦ (i.e. the only-begotten [Son] of God). But this does not enjoy significant ancient support. The last option is to delete either θεός (leaving the reader to understand 'son' along with 'only-begotten' as in v14) or both μονογενής and θεός (getting rid of the problem altogether).

There is a remote possibility of presuming μονογενής ('one of a kind' or 'unique') instead of μονογενής (only-begotten). The commentaries I consulted do not entertain this possibility, probably because they all believe that υἱός is "imperatively demanded" (Barrett 1953:141) and that whether one reads θεός or υἱός does not affect the sense. Neither does the Nestle-Aland version used in this study hint at the μονογεννής possibility in connection with ancient mss. It would solve most problems to read 'the only God' as much, perhaps, as 'the only-begotten Son' does. But with no textual support for this variant, I cannot consider it further.

The difficult text chosen by Nestle-Aland reads *No-one has ever seen God; the only begotten God who is in/at the bosom of the Father, he has showed (him) forth*. All the Sesotho versions read *the only begotten Son*. (So too the RSV which adds a footnote reference to the effect that other authorities read *God*). I favour the difficult reading precisely because it is unlikely to be a corruption.[59] This choice is based on the assumption that the reader is capable of wrestling with this matter, and will thereby be prompted to research and re-read the whole pericope until 'the only-begotten-God' makes sense. I have already argued (chapter 3) that the modern translator-author has to be less patronizing of the reader. I have also noted that the evangelist sometimes plays about with his metaphors. But I would not go so far as to say "whether one reads θεός or υἱός after (ὁ) μονογενής makes no essential difference" (Schnackenburg 1968:279) - whatever the justification.

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[59] I seem to enjoy some company in this, "Christ the Incarnate Word is the perfect revelation of the Father: as God, He reveals God" (Westcott 1964:xliv). Tasker (1960:45) puts it thus: "Even to the Christian, however, the invisible God remains invisible. But to know Jesus Christ is know all that we in our creaturely state are capable of knowing (about the godhead)." Bernard (1928:31) also agrees though he fancies we add a comma before θεος so that we end up with a list of "three distinct designations of Him who is the Exegete or Interpreter of the Father."

Thus we come to the end of our evaluation of the appropriateness and usefulness of our Sesotho versions in the light of the Greek manuscripts. It certainly was not an exhaustive exercise, that would be impossible seeing my 'sources' for the Greek mss are secondary and I did not have the Sesotho versions' translators' notes. In the next chapter, I shall relate the main observations made in this exercise, suggest in the light of the preceding analysis the way forward which includes a rendition of the Prologue that captures the preceding discussion. I must also affirm the four Sesotho versions for being on the whole quite readable. My experience is that N1997 stands out in this regard - somebody else's encounter with these texts may be different.[60] So my translation will still look up to these Sesotho versions.

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[60] Cf. Batalden's France-based Russian Bishop Cassian Bezobrazov of the 1950s and 1960s (1992:75).

Chapter 5

CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS: BACK TO OUR CONTEXT

We have learned to live in multiple cultural contexts. Most of us have the daily experience of the mutual translation of cultures within themselves (Stierle 1996:66).

5.1 The Process in Retrospect

The thinking behind this project has been around the Bible as I, like any Mosotho, can access it in Sesotho. But I also made use of the Greek mss in order to minimize fanciful arguments. I have also studied, instead of one, four Sesotho versions side by side. The experience has been like a rebirth; the discovery that the academic and my Sesotho can critically engage each other as equals has been very affirming.

This thinking that informed this project came about basically because of my experience in the academy, the church and lay-ministerial life - particularly in post-1994 South Africa. My reality is defined in terms of the lingua franca of the modern era, English. This is not in itself an intolerable finding. What is upsetting however is the realization that this 'development' has occurred at the expense of my cultural reality and relevance.

> Early Protestant history in West Africa raised the question for a time (a very short time!) whether a vigorous English-speaking African Church would not render African languages unnecessary, and today one may well wonder whether English has not simply taken over from Latin as the special international language of theology" (Walls 1992:38).

So this project has been about how I might regain something of the rich perspectives that the Bible affords me in the tongue of my culture, and to try to do this without denying what I have become and where I stand.

I have thus studied a circumscribed portion of John's Gospel, chosen - frankly - at random. I have also studied this pericope in Southern and Northern Sotho because these two languages/cultures have always defined my world, from long before English came and overtook them. My intention has been, through the exegesis, to wrestle with the meanings suggested by the versions as we have them, and then to compare them among themselves and with the Greek text as preserved in Nestle-Aland. In doing this, I found myself leaning more towards the struggle to make sense of the texts as they are. This work ended up being restricted to what should come naturally to a mother tongue reader - the ability to extract meaning out of the text with the littlest of effort.

Consequently, I have not reflected on the beauty of the Sesotho biblical texts as much as I had envisaged. This means I was limited in the 'insights' that I could glean from reading the texts, as I spent most of the time grappling with assimilation. But this also means I have achieved the quickening of an ability to critically engage the Bible in Sesotho.

(I hope that the scholarly comments taken into account, though not exhaustively, did not intimidate the Sesotho findings, particularly since they are copious. I also hope that the Sesotho commentary is readable to the ordinary Mosotho believer in spite of the cluttering Greek words and references to some of the big names within scholarship.)

However, before declaring all I have learnt in this study, let me say more about the South African context, particularly with reference to the church and the academy.

5.2 Reflections on the Bible in the Church

Virtually all churches in South Africa are multicultural. This has always been the case, particularly if one ignores the 'race' question. However post-1994 the reality accelerated considerably. It is the resulting appreciation of this reality that calls for serious reflection from all church functionaries on how to best minister to their culturally and linguistically heterogeneous constituencies.

It is at precisely this point that my church, the Full Gospel Church of God in South Africa, has made some astounding attempts to preserve its version of *the full gospel*. Since the dawn of the democratic era in South African politics, there has been pressure towards the unification of the quasi-independent apartheid-induced Indian, Black, Afrikaans and English 'Full Gospels.' Several options were reviewed and I have learnt from reliable sources that the decision-makers have opted to reduce the church nationally into two main streams - 'Afrikaans-speaking' and 'English-speaking' Full Gospel Churches. The accompanying instruction was that the Indians should join the English-speaking current while the Coloureds were to join the Afrikaans-speaking torrent. The Blacks are advised to be guided by the uniqueness of their localities, as some areas like the Free State and the Northern Cape are inclined towards Afrikaans while other areas like Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal are predominantly English.

The sad consequence, one which does not appear entirely unforeseen, is that more Black congregations have gone the route of full autonomy (thus becoming 'charismatic ministries'). Very few have complied with the national mandate, while others are just standing by and hoping that time will tell. Although we must not overinflate the matter, this development has shattered years of comradeship among Black pastors within the church, to speak from the perspective I know rather well.

I am raising this illustration from my own background to highlight the challenges that must be faced by those who genuinely seek to serve their communities. The formerly 'Black Bible Colleges' of the Full Gospel Church have had to merge with the formerly 'White' ones. Not only has this seen a drop in Black enrolment, but there has also been a drop in Black staff since their White counterparts, naturally, are better qualified for the jobs in question.

Not all Black pastors are in possession of a diploma or some certificate in Theology. In fact a bachelors degree in theology among the Black pastors is a great achievement; a masters degree in theology a rare jewel. But, and ironically so, there is also a strong attitude that higher qualifications are a luxury since there are more pressing issues (mainly 'reaching the lost'). Among Black Pentecostal/Charismatic churches, formal theology has the unfortunate stigma that it is not Christian enough. Few of the very few university-trained pastors are by their living and ministry posing a threat to this stereotype.

There are other consequences of these developments within the Full Gospel Church, but the preceding examples paint a clear enough portrait. The obvious, perhaps intended, fallout of our church's national resolution is that Afrikaans and English continue their pre-1994 cause of being the only official languages of South Africa. To put it differently, the home languages of the majority of South Africans are excluded in *the church* in addition to their absence in *parliament* (it would be tedious and uneconomical to debate in all the languages of the RSA), *education* (certainly universities and most good schools have neither the time nor the resources to study or teach in the indigenous languages), *public media* (it is no longer shocking to see two Black SABC continuity presenters 'doing their job' entirely in English), *business* (he who has the money calls the shots), etc.[61]

In spite of having been in KwaZulu-Natal for some time now, I know that my command of isiZulu is not such that I can confidently preach in this language. Moreover, there are a number of non-Zulu speakers in the church I attend as well. So whenever I have to preach, I do so in English with the help of an interpreter. But during those times when I am back home in Gauteng I also find it difficult to expound the Bible in Sesotho. So my existential context evidently makes it impossible for me to point a finger of judgement. This, sadly, is the experience of most of my peers. In fact some of us are frightened of what is likely to become of the next generation(s) of African children considering the rate at which African languages are eroding.

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[61] English, especially post-1994, pervades all these institutions to a degree much higher than that of Afrikaans. As a result Afrikaans-speaking South Africans are fighting for the recognition of their cultural heritage (cf.. Maartens 1998). The seriousness of this struggle is explicated in the Full Gospel Church's adoption of both English and Afrikaans as equal ('official') partners, to the exclusion of the majority of African languages. "The only language which seems not to have been affected in any way by the language clauses contained in the 1996 South African Constitution...is English. In fact, English seems to be gaining ground daily, and that, at the cost of all the other South African languages" (McDermott 1998:105).

But the Bible is available in people's mother tongues! We are fortunate in the RSA that most

indigenous languages have Bibles or portions thereof, not disregarding that in most cases use was

made of 'representative' dialects. But this factuality is not reflected in many churches; liturgical rites

must be carried out in people's mother tongues. Perhaps beyond celebrating the availability of the

Bible in the vernacular, we must also work for the translation of our churches into *Africanese*. This

reality makes even more compelling the need to reflect on ways whereby the churches can

meaningfully and systematically rehabilitate the mother tongues of most South Africans. Because,

> As a result of the official languages policies over the years, most African people attach little
> value to their mother tongue and believe it to be deficient or impoverished in a way that makes
> it unsuitable for use in modern society....
> Only if the leadership is seen to take pride in all South African languages; only if all schools
> value every child's mother tongue as an unique asset, offering multilingual options; and only
> if people are rewarded for their knowledge of a variety of languages in terms of jobs and
> status, can language practice eventually reflect languages policy (Maartens 1998:35).

There is no doubt that conscious and intentional efforts are being called for. The local churches will

need to be more creative than ever. The blissful years of exclusive congregations are over. Simplistic

and wishful solutions such as has been enforced within the Full Gospel Church are unrealistic and

undesirable. If every citizen of South Africa (and of the continent) is to fully enjoy the richness of the

cultural diversity inherent therein, then each cultural voice will need to be afforded a platform from

which to tell God's wonders in its own dialect. But what of the academy specifically?

5.3 The Mother Tongue Bible in Biblical Studies

The quest within Biblical Studies to develop a contextual and relevant discipline that utilizes homegrown artefacts has been around for a while now.[62] Sadly though, and Jeremy Punt (1999) alerted me to this, there is more talk and prescriptive exercises from Biblical Studies about critical vernacular studies of the Bible than there are attempts to do the actual studying. The few that have done such studies, did so in order to prove this or that point, but not because studying the Bible in the people's mother tongues is essential to Biblical Studies in Africa per se. Despite noble intentions, this present study is also guilty of this disservice in some respects.

Perhaps a lesson might be gleaned from the close connection between Bible translation and the rise of Protestantism (if I may overlook Hus, Wycliffe and others before the Reformation as well as other contemporaries of the Reformation). *Sola Scriptura* with the Bible in the vernacular facilitated the accession of European contextual theologies to the centre stage of European Christianity. Biblical exegesis in the vernacular (with access to the biblical languages) became the framework and basis of all theologizing.[63] Now that the Two-Thirds World is becoming the most important voice in Christianity, should not the theologizing of the third millennium be informed by sound biblical exegesis grounded in the practical/pragmatic world of Africans? The nineteenth-century missionary

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[62] Journal articles to this effect exceed the books published on the subject. From the latter category I am aware of *The Bible in African Christianity* co-edited by Hannah W Kinoti and John M Waliggo (1997) and a much-awaited *The Bible in Africa* (ed by G O West). From the category of journal or book articles Gerald West, Jonathan Draper, Tinyiko Maluleke, Jeremy Punt and Musa Dube are also worthy of mention in this connection in southern Africa.

[63] Cf.. Escobar 1992:85f. "The vernacular principle received its most rigorous assertion in the sixteenth century. Protestantism is essentially Northern vernacular Christianity. Its very diversity is related to the diversity of the local settings; it is Christianity translated, not only into local languages but into the cultural settings of Northern Europe" (Walls 1992:38).

was more a person of handcrafts, and less a person of speculations. No wonder Bible translation and acculturation were somewhat instinctive to them - Catholic or Protestant.

We have already hinted, in an earlier chapter, that the only way out, as we see it, is for our classrooms (microcosm) to depict our larger reality (macrocosm). We must entertain the possibility of everyone incorporating their mother tongue into their Biblical Studies training. Otherwise we must ensure that they have built into their mother tongue biblical tools such materials as are going to help them gain optimally from their private mother tongue study. Far from presuming consensus on the interpretation of the Bible, this assertion is merely urging the academy to endure the responsibility of ensuring that each Mosotho (and every other mother tongue) student of the Bible is afforded the same opportunities as the English reader - Concordances, Bible Dictionaries, Interlinear Versions, etc.

In fact the option of several mother tongues being used in a classroom (communal) is more profitable for all involved. This is not to say that the former option is entirely undesirable, alongside the latter. If indeed our diversity is something we are proud of, then it ought to show in our formal and informal interactions. I need not point out how such a practice will take Biblical Studies closer to the communities. Lest I begin to sound like a clanging cymbal, I shall only note one additional observation.

Some scholars have ahead of me begun thinking of grounding the Bible in Africa. Here candidates include Kwame Bediako's writings (e.g. 2000:9) and the practice he has instituted at the Akrofi

Christaller Memorial Centre[64] where the Bible is read and reflected upon in the local tongue(s). This

affords theologians and lay Christians the opportunity to share insights on an equal footing - the text

as they have it.

The Institute for the Study of the Bible[65] is another worthy candidate. Here the Bible is read with

marginalized communities in a liberating way, and this is a very necessary exercise in the country with

a history such as ours. But this 'pre-text' of 'liberation' clouds the process because, among other

things, facilitators are constrained to choose only those texts that lend themselves (a) to their

'liberation' agenda and (b) to discourage straying (uncritical or undisciplined) insights. This desire

to liberate ends up controlling the study of the Bible. The result is that it is not the Bible as the people

have it but the interests of the *paedagogos* (or *epitropos*?) that are engaged.

Another area the academy must explore in this translation connection is the use of vernacular

translations in the 'development' or 'reconstruction' programmes in Africa. This is what Whang calls

"social concern for translation work" (1999:46; cf. Whiteman 1992). It would also be instructive to

see studies conducted on how vernacular translations might assist or hamper the struggles of women

in the academy, the Church and in society at large. It certainly was a relief for me not to worry about

the singular third person personal pronoun since Sesotho only has one personal pronoun applicable

to either gender.

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[64] I was able to witness this in person, courtesy of the ATF scholarship that enabled me to spend some months studying in Ghana.

[65] A project of the School of Theology, University of Natal, directed by Gerald West. West's works of 1991 & 1993 explain in detail the modus operandi of the ISB.

Otherwise we must pay due respect to the missionaries, as Lamin Sanneh's works ever remind us. They have outdone modern scholars by learning the languages of the people and translating the Bible into those languages as best they could. There is no more liberating feeling than the awareness that the Creator accepts me as I am and can actually speak my mother tongue! It is not justifiable to even condemn missionaries if we are failing on the very central issue of God's communication - *the Word become flesh*. The initial step in the right direction is to acknowledge the often unsettling reality that our context is speckled, and learn to be at home just as the Word was in the flesh.

5.4 Bringing the Bible Home

> But at the same time the new has blended with the old. New beliefs, customs, situations - whether freely accepted or imposed - do not summarily sever the ties between past and present: the new is built upon the old and the product is usually a synthesis of the two.... For the fact is that an increasing number of westernized blacks reach a compromise that meets their desire to be more aware of the past and to value their rich cultural heritage (West 1976:7).

5.4.1 *Interlinguistic Gains*

In the spirit of the above paragraph, we desire, where the Bible is concerned, a mutual coexistence characterized by equal partnerships and reciprocal respect between Africa and the academy. But here again the order must be reversed: what is African, the vernacular exegesis in the academy, is 'the new' while the traditional Western Biblical Studies is 'the old.' The lettered African must enjoy the rediscovery of the possibilities opened by serious mother tongue study of the Bible in the place where he/she was westernized. In this way we transcend fundamental biblical literacy and allow all sectors of the indigenous population the opportunity to discourse in their particular socio-

cultural contexts, in their mother tongues, and alongside other language groups.

So with due respect to earlier translators of the Bible into Sesotho, I have in this project been trying to continue the process of building the new upon the old by integrating my African experience with my academic training. The aim was not to do away with 'the old' - it is part of my identity. On the contrary, I only sought with trepidation as it were, to contribute to the growing need for user-friendly tools,[66] particularly in our multi-cultural context. As a result, I offer my own renditions of John 1:1-18 below. These are based on the vernacular exegesis carried out in the preceding chapter.

In fact, I am convinced that we are headed in the direction where several languages will capture the Bible side-by-side in one volume. There is no better way of being user-friendly to a person of my circumstances: I am Northern Sotho, better able to express myself in Southern Sotho and English, comfortable in reading and writing Setswana, isiZulu and isiXhosa, having formally studied Afrikaans up to pre-university year, and needing each day to communicate in several of these (and one or two other) languages. If anything, I am blessed that this study has allowed me space to represent this reality of my life, albeit to a limited degree.

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[66] "Many translations have had the purported aim of producing a text faithful to the sense or meaning of the original, while at the same time being able to be understood by its users. It is hard to imagine a translation arguing otherwise" (Porter 1999:24).

My Renditions of John 1:1-18

Southern Sotho

1 Tshimolohong Lentswe le ne le ntse le le teng. Lentswe le ne le le ho Modimo, hape Lentswe e ne e le Modimo.

2 Le ne le le teng tshimolohong le Modimo.

3 Dintho tsohle di entswe ke lona, mme hara dintho tsohle tse entsweng ha ho letho le entsweng kantle ho lona.

4 Bophelo bo ho lona, bophelo boo e leng lesedi la batho.

5 Lesedi leo le kganya lefifing, mme lefifi ha le a ka la le tshwara.

6 Motho o kile a ba teng, a romilwe ke Modimo, lebitso la hae e le Johanne.

7 O ne a tletse ho tla ba paki, ho tla paka ditaba tsa lesedi, hore bohle ba tle ba dumele ka yena.

8 Yena e ne e se lesedi leo, haese fela ya pakang tsa lesedi.

9 Lesedi la nnete le neng le ntse le le teng, le bonesetsang batho bohle, le ne le etla lefatsheng.

10 Le ne le ntse le le lefatsheng, mme lefatshe le entswe ke lona, empa lefatshe ha le a ka la le tseba.

11 Le ne le tle ho tsa lona, empa bao e leng ba lona ha ba le amohela.

12 Empa bohle ba le amohetseng, ba dumetseng lebitsong la lona, le ba neile tokelo ya ho ba bana ba Modimo.

13 Bana, e seng ba madi, kapa ba thato ya nama, kapa ba thato ya monna, empa e le ba tswetsweng ke Modimo.

14 Lentswe la fetoha nama, mme a aha hara rona. Ra boha kganya ya hae, kganya e kang ya ngwana a le mong wa Ntatae, a tletse mohau le nnete.

15 (Johanne o mo supile, a tiisa ka lentswe le phahameng a re: "Enwa ke yena eo ke neng ke mmolela ha ke ne ke re: 'Ya tlang kamorao ho nna, o moholo ho nna, hobane e sa le teng pele ho nna.'")

16 Ho jwalo hobane ho se a neng a tletse ka sona, rona bohle re amohetse mohau hodima mohau.

17 Hobane molao o neilwe ka Moshe, mohau le nnete di bile teng ka Jesu Kreste.

18 Ha ho ya kileng a bona Modimo le ka mohla; Modimo ya tswetsweng a nnotshi, ya leng sefubeng sa Ntatae, ke yena ya mo tsebahaditseng.

Northern Sotho

1 Mathomong-thomong Lentšu o be a dutše a le gona. Lentšu o be a le go Modimo, a bile gape e le Modimo.

2 O be a le gona mathomong, a ena le Modimo.

3 Dilo tšohle di hlodilwe ke yena, mme go tše di hlodilwego ga go selo se se hlodilwego ntle le yena.

4 Bophelo bo dutše bo le mo go yena, bophelo bjoo e lego seetša sa batho.

5 Seetša sa gona se bonega mo leswiswing, fela leswiswi ga se le se sware.

6 Go kile gwa ba le motho, a romilwe ke Modimo, leina la gagwe e le Johane.

7 Yena o be a tletše go ba hlatse, go tlo hlatsela taba tša seetša, gore bohle ba tle ba dumele ka yena.

8 Yena e be e se seetša seo, sa gagwe e be e le go tlo hlatsela 'taba tša seetša.

9 Seetša-etša seo se bego se dutše se le gona, mme se bonegela batho bohle, se be se etla lefaseng.

10 O be a dutše a le lefaseng, e bile lefase le hlodilwe ke yena, fela lefase ga se le mo tsebe.

11 A tla go tša gagwe, fela batho ba gagwe ba se mo amogele.

12 Eupša bao ba ilego ba mo amogela, ba go dumela mo leineng la gagwe, o ba neile tokelo ya go ba bana ba Modimo.

13 Bana e sego ba madi, goba ba thato ya nama, goba ba thato ya monna, eupša e le ba go tšwa go Modimo.

14 Yaba Lentšu o fetoga nama, a dula le rena. Gomme ra bogela letago la gagwe, letago le bjalo ka la Mmelegwa-noši wa Tatagwe, a tletše kgaugelo le therešo.

15 (Johane o mo šupile, a mo hlatsela a goelela a re: "Yo ke yena yo ke bego ke mmolela mola ke re: 'E a ntlhatlamago o mpheta ka bogolo, ka gore o dutše a le gona pele nna ke eba gona.'")

16 Se re se tseba ka gore mo go tlaleng ga gagwe, rena bohle re amogetše, a kgaugelo e kaakaa!

17 Ka ge molao o neilwe ka Moše, kgaugelo le therešo di bile gona ka Jesu Kreste.

18 Ga go yo a kilego a bona Modimo; Modimo-mmelegwa-noši, wa go botega kudu go Tatagwe, ke yena yo a mo tsebagaditšego.

The days of being clinical as though languages existed in neatly defined vacuums are over. This side-by-side interlinguistic presentation of the Prologue to John's Gospel highlights the similarities between the two Sesotho languages used. It simultaneously helps the reader to appreciate the idiomatic differences because although the same word exists in both languages it may not always be

the best choice depending on the context. This is not only a reference to taboos, but to possibilities in one language being impossibilities in another. For example, in Northern Sotho one must be careful of their insatiable desire to respect - the personal pronoun used for *Lentšu*, the plural is preferable even if reference is to one person (here not observed as in N1986 and N1997 because it would make the text a little cumbersome), less direct and more euphemistic, etc. A good example of the differences can be seen in verse 18. It is perfectly acceptable in Southern Sotho to say that someone is 'by the chest of someone else' to denote intimacy. But it is an unknown construction in Northern Sotho, I could fabricate it but then it would be artificial and not represent anything to a Mopedi. In fact, such awkward constructions by translators are often responsible for the alleged foreignness of the Bible.

5.4.2 *Intralinguistic Gains*

Placing several renditions of the same text side-by-side in one language has its benefits too, as some English 'parallel Bibles' demonstrate. First, it undermines the obsession of translators with the belief that theirs is the best possible translation. Secondly, it liberates the reader who realizes that fixation with some choices to the neglect of other possibilities is at best naive. Then it allows the same team of translators to produce more than one 'version' of the same text, i.e. to bare all possible renditions and leave the reader with the responsibility of deciphering the author's message in the most appropriate mother tongue idiom.

Of course this does not eliminate all difficulties, but another of its benefits relates to the readiness it would generate among lay and ordained users of the Bible to engage one another and Bible translators in meaningful discussions. Dispelling the superficial monolithic author's sense conveyed by mono-dictional (mono-tonal) versions, it will arouse the readers' curiosity. The alternative (i.e. current practice) is patronizing and presumes that translators are mind-readers who know what the reader needs as well as what the author meant.[67]

Learning the Bible this intralinguistically side-by-side way is liberating precisely because of the relative freedom from *textuality* that it affords the reader. Reading comparatively, the reader approximates the spirit of the Word much more easily, thus evading the temptation to base convictions on one misapprehended word or phrase as has often been observed, especially among people who do not have commentaries or adequate language skills.[68] Meaning is the goal rather than memorization, and the comparison makes it rather difficult to focus on the letter but easier to focus on the spirit. *Orality*, the realm in which most Africans naturally operate with the Bible, is thus affirmed.

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[67] Whang (1999:58-60), although arguing in favour of many rather than one official translation, is worth paraphrasing: "I expect that objections will be raised against the idea of maintaining ambiguity in the translation of Scripture....But...the fact that the Bible is intended to be understood does not necessarily mean that all of it can be understood without studying or instruction....Now the Bible is not a book of a small group of people who believe that they are different from the rest of the world. The Bible is literally the property of humanity and its history. When we think of this situation, it is natural that the use of the Bible is so diverse...." He agrees with me on the need to have all the various possibilities preserved and presented to the reader, but we differ in the matter of the locus of this preservation. Unlike him, I am convinced that all these varied renditions are best placed side-by-side.

[68] I wish that I could have been able to present intralinguistic renditions of John 1:1-18 in both Southern and Northern Sotho languages by way of demonstrating the assertions being made here. Unfortunately, time does not alloow me the luxury to pursue that exercise, since I do not feel that ready to attempt such a task.

It is also evident that I am now keen to check my Sesotho impressions with other Sesotho and non-

Sesotho speakers. This is a blessing in that I relate to mother tongue readers of the Bible on their own

turf, and not on the basis of some hegemonic language of the elite.

There is profound wisdom in Jesus' words captured by Matthew (13:52):

RSV	S1987	S1989	N1986	Twi
Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.	Mongodi e mong le e mong, ya rutilweng tsa mmuso wa mahodimo, o jwalo ka motho eo e leng monga ntlo, ya ntshang dintho tse ntjha le dintho tsa kgale letlotlong la hae.	Setsebi se seng le se seng sa molao se rutilweng tsa mmuso wa mahodimo se tshwana le monga ntlo ya ntshang tse ntjha le tsa kgale letlotlong la hae.	Ke gona motho wa mangwalo, mang le mang e a rutegetšego mmušo wa magodimo o swana le mong wa lapa, e a ntšhago tše mpsha le tša kgale lehumong la gagwe.	Na ɔka kyerɛɛ wɔn sɛ: Eyi nti ɔkyerɛwfo biara a wɔayɛ no osuani ama ɔsoro ahenni no te sɛ ofiwura bi a ofi n'ademude mu yi nneɛma afoforo ne adedaw adi.

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DDD see *Van der Toorn et al.*

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