

Sabine Dievenkorn

The Bible in Culturally Balanced and Inclusive Spanish: An Approach to Promote a Project from Chile

“Bibel in gerechter Sprache” – La Biblia alemana en lenguaje mas justo: A Practical-Theological Description of an Example for Intercultural Dialogue in Chile

Six years ago in Germany, a number of mainly female theologians, academics, practitioners,¹ pastors, laypersons, and communities² worked on a translation of the Bible into just language in the attempt to implement gender equality from a linguistic standpoint, to correct anti-semitic overtones in current translations, and clearly identify and update the Bible’s socio-economic connotations in its translation.³

The demand for an “inclusive” language of Bible translations first developed in the United States and was then picked up in German-speaking countries. From the start, “inclusive” was not limited to gender, but also aimed at a more sensitive handling of differences in skin color, religious denomination, and sexual orientation. The US-American efforts regarding the English translation were a tremendous encouragement for the German project.⁴ So far there

¹ Cf. the list of translators with their affiliations and professional background in: Ulrike Bail, Marlene Crüsemann, Frank Crüsemann, et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 4th enlarged and improved edition (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2006), 2397.

² The translations were developed in a unique process: for over two and a half years anybody interested in the project could take an active part in open discussions, preliminary trials, virtual and real review forums, cf. Bail, *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 21-22.

³ Cf. Ulrike Bail, Marlene Crüsemann, Frank Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Gerechtigkeit im Hinblick auf den christlich-jüdischen Dialog* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2008), 10ff.

⁴ *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* is another step on a journey which many have embarked on decades ago, encouraged especially by the US-American translations cf. National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (eds.), *An Inclusive Language Lectionary – Readings for Year A* (Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1983), National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America (eds.), *An Inclusive Language Lectionary – Readings for Year B* (Westminster Press: Philadelphia 1984), National Council of the Churches of Christ

is no complete Spanish translation of the Bible, which is “just” according to the definition above.⁵

In spite of the broad acceptance of the German Bible in just language reflected in its impressively high sales figures,⁶ criticism from church administrations continues.⁷ Upon closer examination, however, their arguments frequently turn out to be unsubstantiated.⁸

What makes the German enterprise unique, is the fact that it is the first Bible translation into German since Martin Luther’s translation of 1534 which was

in the United States of America (eds.), *An Inclusive Language Lectionary – Readings for Year C* (1985) (Westminster Press: Philadelphia, 1985).

⁵ There is the Catholic translation into English: *The Inclusive Bible. The First Egalitarian Translation*, herausgegeben by the Priests for Equality (Sheed & Ward: Lanham 2007; paperback 2009). This Bible was published 2 years after the German *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* and also amends e.g. the original text in Gen 1:27 with the following note for the translation: “fill the earth and be responsible for it. Watch over the fish...”: “The Hebrew original for ‘responsible’ (שׂבַב) is close to the term for rape (cf. Est 7:8), and has a militant context even in understated form.”

⁶ “Shortly after the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* was published in late 2006 the first edition was out of stock: 20,000 were sold within just a few days. The 2nd edition of another 20,000 books was quickly sold out. The *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* is finding a ready market.” <http://www.kirchenbezirk-geislingen.de/cms/startseite/seelsorgebr-und-mehr-als-sie-glauben/bibel/bibel-in-gerechter-sprache/>, 4.2.2012 (my translation). Now there is a paperback edition and on November 21, 2011 the 4th edition was published in paperback format.

⁷ Recommendations of the regional churches of the EKD (Protestant church of Germany) can be found at http://www.ekd.de/presse/pm67_2007_bibel_in_gerechter_sprache.html, 4.2.2012.

⁸ “And then there are the academic theologians. It is hard to shed the feeling that they are criticizing the project simply because it isn’t theirs. There is a lot of envy and rancorosity involved, and very little factual argumentation”, writes A. Mertin, <http://www.theomag.de/46/am205.htm>, 4.2.2013 (my translation). He further points out that Ingo Dalferth’s criticism seems ambiguous at best, considering that he translated the New Testament himself, especially since the theologian has his own website for critiquing the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, see <http://www.bigs-gutachten.de>, 4.2.2012: “in order to vent his criticism, but above all to call attention to himself and his work.” Those who are following the ongoing fuss about such a self-evident project as the re-translation of the Bible into a just language must be scratching their heads in wonder. The critics pretend that the *sola scriptura* was supposedly derived from natural science, and is not a matter of interpretation and analysis. Heresy and – with denunciatory intentions – “political correctness” are attested to, even though anyone can see that the intention was simply to resolve confusion and trigger reflection. If we were talking about the fine arts, an approach which challenges understanding and thus stimulates personal reflection would be considered completely normal and an enrichment to the experience. Of course there are many ways to interpret and unlock the secrets of art objects and their history. However, in theology we are immediately talking about heresy and the threatening deviation from scripture and its teachings.

not commissioned by a church or confraternity and which has stirred up such a huge response.⁹ For the first time in history women (who are in the majority in every church worldwide) can use a Bible which makes their biblical members of their sex expressly visible wherever previously they were semantically and syntactically implied to but not verbally included. This is not without problems, as the critics of this project continue to point out.¹⁰

This Bible reads differently. That said, it is basically a “Bible from below”,¹¹ a translation from the perspective of the underdog, even though the group of translators mainly consists of recognized experts in biblical studies and philology.¹²

A similar project was kicked off in Chile in 2012.¹³ Especially in the Evangelical context, education is not readily available and women are doubly

⁹ Cf. <http://www-user.uni-bremen.de/~wie/translation/Deutsche-Bibeluebersetzungen.html>, 2.4.2012.

¹⁰ For criticism of the German translation project see the collection of essays: Ingo Dalferth (ed.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache? Kritik eines misslungenen Versuchs* (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen 2007). See also the linguistic debates in the German-speaking countries about the lack of female generics, cf. e.g. Ivo Hajnal, “*Feministische Sprachkritik und historische Sprachwissenschaft. Die unterschiedlichen Sichtweisen der Kategorie Genus in Syn- und Diachronie*”, http://www.uibk.ac.at/sprachen-literaturen/sprawi/pdf/Hajnal/a9_fem_hist_sprawi.pdf, 11.04.2013. Because simple examples refute this lack of female generics at least in the German-speaking countries, Anatol Stefanowitsch, *Frauen natürlich ausgenommen*, <http://www.scilogs.de/wblogs/blog/sprachlog/sprachstruktur/2011-12-14/frauen-natuerlich-ausgenommen>, 2.4.2012.

¹¹ Terminology of the grass-root church movement, cf. “Kirche von unten” (church from below) in former East Germany, cf. <http://www.jugendopposition.de/index.php?id=205>, 4.2.2012. The “Initiative Kirche von unten” (initiative church from below) is an ecumenical network which developed out of a 1978 Catholic initiative in West Germany. See also the list of donors, individuals, and organizations, from within the church (students, female employees of the Philipps University in Marburg/Germany specializing in Protestant theology), from outside the church (Vereinigung berufstätiger Frauen e.V. Wuppertal/Germany, Studien Kontakt Reisen – Reisen in Biblische Landschaft, Bonn/Germany), church-owned institutions (Theologinnenkonvent Sachsen, Ev.-luth. Kirchengemeine St. Johannis der Täufer, Oldenstadt/Germany) that helped make the project financially viable: Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al., *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 2383ff. See also: Ulrike Bail, Marlene Crüsemann, Frank Crüsemann et al., “Die Bibel in gerechter Sprache ist eine Basisübersetzung”, in: Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 22-24.

¹² 42 female translators and ten male translators, of which only five do not hold a PhD. However, three of those were science officers working on their doctorate at the time of the translation. Cf. Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 2397ff.

¹³ In January of 2012 a task group at the Comunidad Teológica Evangélica de Chile in Concepción led by Sabine Dievenkorn began their translation work after long preparations.

disadvantaged and excluded.¹⁴ As elsewhere in Latin America and in this world, it is especially important for women to work on a translation which refers to current theological research as well as contextually oriented social sciences and the ethical parameters at the dawn of a new era.¹⁵

Keeping the critical discourse around the German project constructively in mind, and taking advantage of the profound interreligious, gender-critical, and theologically up-to-date research and translation efforts in German-speaking countries, a group of female theologians in Chile is trying to offer their own translation, based on their situation in a missionized country whose indigenous religions were lost during proselytization. This translation wants to be a voice in the choir of other voices who already exist. The starting point of this project is therefore contextually anchored theology, which frequently only exists as an oral tradition and lived practice, and at first glance seems to lie well beyond the academic context. Drawing on existing current editions of biblical texts in the protolanguages as well as the German Bible in just language, the translators build on the theological and academic work that has already been done in Europe.

During their work, the female translators come to the amazing realization that the common experience of “being a women” creates a stronger bond than denominational affiliations, political views, or professions of faith. The author

¹⁴ The “Protestant” church in Chile must be understood as a combination of newly founded modern Evangelical churches which continue to be created. Many of those are of the opinion that the letter kills (cf. the traditional reading of 2Cor 3:6), and they view verbal inspiration as one of their basic dogmas. This combination together with the long indigenous tradition of passing on stories orally and the consequent inexistence of the written word devalues education as an academic enterprise. Unfortunately this often includes discursive thinking. Thirst for knowledge is interpreted as contest or contradiction.

¹⁵ A translation is oriented on the proto-languages and the “original” text constructed by historico-theological or historico-biblical research. The Bible in just language tries to help readers to become aware of biblical traditions, without requiring any knowledge of the original language. In Germany it is required to understand the so-called biblical “Ursprachen” (proto-languages) as a precondition for studying theology, just like Latin does or should open the doors to church-historical debates. To my knowledge this can hardly be achieved in the Protestant/Evangelical context of South and Central America for several reasons. Most of the time it is impossible. However, there is a tremendous interest in the Bible. In such a context the level of excellence of a Bible translation plays an extremely important role. Excellence as a sign of quality includes that the invisible becomes visible, that social justice becomes just as clear as the appreciation of women. This does not mean that difficult or complicated issues become easier! One of the roots of the projects of developing a Bible translation in just Spanish is liberation theology which in turn has its roots in the Latin American continent.

was peripherally involved in the German project and is now taking part in the project of translating the Bible into Latin American Spanish initiated in Chile. As a member of an interim government immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall, she was also able to experience this kind of bonding with women in a political context. Within the women's departments of the government the common dedication to political issues regarding women was always much more important than differences in party or religio-political affiliations. Therefore this project is very much a Protestant¹⁶ as well as an ecumenical,¹⁷ multicultural, and interdisciplinary enterprise, which provides important inter-religious¹⁸ incentives.

The undertaking of making the Bible sound "inclusive" is therefore not just limited to the question of gender. It also aims at a sensitive handling of differences in skin colour, religious denomination and sexual orientation. For example, the German project therefore also integrated Muslim voices in a broader effort to create gender equality in all religions.¹⁹ Based on the work done in Europe, it must be noted that Muslim and Christian women report that the Bible in just language represents an important basis for common discussions about the place of women in Holy Scriptures, but also a suitable resource in the personal dialogue with God.²⁰

In addition to the inclusion of current linguistic discussions about gender inclusiveness, the goal of a Bible translation in just language is to take the results of feminist theology, Jewish-Christian dialogue, social ethics, and liberation theology into consideration in the process of translation. Not only is the Bible in just language meant to differ from other translations by its profile,

¹⁶ Cf. the Protestant vision of Martin Luther (as it was called later on) which began with his Bible translation at the Wartburg in 1534 and to which we owe our emancipatory strength to this day.

¹⁷ Nine Catholic colleagues were involved in the translation, cf. Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 239ff.

¹⁸ One guideline is the removal of anti-Semitic tendencies in the language of existing translations and the resulting ways of thinking and basic theological principles. The Brazilian theologian Ivoni Richter Reimer is a well-known supporter of feminist theories who, like others, comes from a different cultural area. Cf. Ivoni Richter-Reimer, *Grava-me como selo sobre teu coração. Teologia Bíblica Feminista* (Paulinas: São Paulo 2005).

¹⁹ Cf. Rabeya Müller, "Geschlechter-Gerechtigkeit in den Religionen", *Muslim contribution to the publication of the Bible in gerechter Sprache*, <http://www.uni-muenster.de/FB2/aktuelles/exegeseat/neuaufgabeigs.html>, 11.4.2013.

²⁰ See also the various suggestions in Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 18-21.

but also by revealing its intentions right from the start, from the very beginning. Everybody knows the target. It emphatically does not want to take the place of traditional Bible translations, but is intended as a pointed amendment and as a new status quo on a never-ending journey.

Any interpretation through the translation of the biblical message is based on a practical-theological and socio-ethical concept of justice:²¹ this means that translation efforts do the text justice by being more than just linguistically correct.²² The interpretation of the original meaning of the biblical message is adjusted to meet the conditions of understanding as they present themselves in the 21st century.²³ Such an enterprise must refer both to the generalizable scientific discourses of epistemology and methodology, but also to the contextual influences and opinions of men and women in communities and churches, and in some cases also outside of them.

On the basis of the theological research in Europe regarding context and language analysis, guidelines for a translation of the Bible in just language can be outlined as follows²⁴. Women should be expressly named wherever socio-historical research suggests that they are included. Therefore the Bible in just language speaks of “Jüngerinnen und Jüngern” (German endings indicating female and male disciples) and “Pharisäerinnen und Pharisäern” (female and male Pharisees), because either the New Testament tells us that women were part of these groupings, or because socio-historical research has come to this result.²⁵

It should become evident that Jesus and the biblical apostles (again both male and female)²⁶ considered themselves as members of the Jewish community in

²¹ Justice is a central term not only in European theology but in all liberation theologies, independent of its spiritual eschatological or socio-ethical connotations.

²² Cf. as a distinctive translation example: Gen 1:27–28: “Entonces Dios creó a Adán, los seres humanos, como imagen divina; como imagen de Dios son creados, masculino y femenino. Él, Ella les creó. Y Dios les bendijo y les dijo: ‘Serán fructíferos, y se reproducirán y llenarán la tierra; tienen el poder y la capacidad de ser responsables y complementarios de los peces del mar y de los pájaros del cielo y los animales que andan por la tierra.’” (Frauen-Arbeitsgruppe CTE, *La Biblia justa*, Concepción, 2012, unpublished draft).

²³ In the German edition “female slave” instead of “maid-servant”, “unemployed” instead of “idle”.

²⁴ Cf. Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 21ff.

²⁵ Take a critical look at the debate over *εποιησεν* (to do) instead of *εξελεξατο* (to choose) with regards to the creation of the group of disciples, Mk 3:13-19 (και *εποιησεν* *δωδεκα*) and the inclusion or exclusion of female disciples into or from a so-called circle of twelve, in: Jens Schröter, “Ideologie und Freiheit”, in: Dalferth, *Bibel in gerechter Sprache?*, 1-30, here 6.

²⁶ Cf. Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in Gerechter Sprache*, 7-8.

which they introduced new critical ideas, but from which they did not distance themselves categorically – unlike the church did later on.²⁷ For example, the theses of the Sermon of the Mount (Mt 5:21-48) are no longer translated with the limiting “But I say unto you”, as in an antithesis, but rather following the rabbinical practice of interpretation and temporariness as “Today I interpret this for you as follows”.

“Social realities” such as slavery or the power structures of the Roman Empire which are mentioned in the text should be clearly recognizable as such and should not be trivialized or spiritualized, as was often the case in previous translations. For example, the “maid-servant” in Martin Luther’s translation becomes the “female slave” again, because this term describes the conditions of oppression more precisely.

The belief that God is beyond any human comprehension or possibilities to find names is provided for by not translating the proper name of God (which according to Jewish tradition must not be pronounced) in a “patriarchal lordship language” as “Lord”. Instead, wherever the basic text contains or implies the proper name of God, the Bible in just language offers different ways of reading it, such as “the Living” (with masculine and feminine endings in German), “He”, “She”, “the Eternal” (indicating male and female in German), “God”, etc.²⁸ These examples show that this translation is not about simplification. On the contrary: scientific and political demands are high. A Bible in just (or at least more just) language is not a Bible in simple language,²⁹ and also not one which just adds the feminine wherever there is a masculine.

The project in Chile began one year ago and is now entering a phase of intercontinental and international communication. When comparing the translations of the texts which have been worked on so far, one can easily notice that they are much richer than earlier translations. The profile is transparent, unlike in most other translations. In addition, the often unconventional translations

²⁷ Cf. e.g. Frank Crüsemann, *Religionsgeschichte Israels in alttestamentlicher Zeit* (Mohr-Siebeck: Tübingen 1983), 41-42.

²⁸ Cf. die Lesevorschläge für den Namen Gottes in der *Bibel für Gerechte Sprache* in: Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 18-21.

²⁹ In a certain sense this makes the demands elitist again. The practical-theological question is: why make do without? Or: why keep the demands low? Or: pragmatically and theologically, find a dialectic solution which creates a relationship between the real Latin American context and the biblical-theological work at the basis in Europe.

stimulate discussions without boundaries in every sense of the word.³⁰ This makes the exchange exciting and interesting, and a North American feedback worthwhile, especially since the Latin American project relates to a Central European project which has received its incentives mainly from the United States.

The Bible in Just Languages: A Practical-theological Description of an Intercultural Consideration

The Bible in Just Language – A Text Example

The Inclusive Bible in English translates Gen 1:26–28 as follows:

Then God said: “Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us. Let them be stewards of the fish in the sea [...] Humankind was created in God’s reflection: in the divine image God created them; female and male, God made them. God blessed them and said: Bear fruits, increase your numbers fill the earth and be responsible for it! Watch over the fish [...]”

Luther’s German translation of the same text³¹, reads in the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, when translated back into English:

Then God said: “Let us make humans – in our image, in our shape. Let them force the fish in the ocean into submission [...]” Then God created Adam, the human beings, as a divine image, they were created in the image of God, male and female did he, did she, did God create them. Then God blessed them, and God spoke to them: Be fertile, increase your numbers, fill the earth, and take possession of it. Force it into submission!”³²

The difference between the translations draws attention to a wider theological horizon, raising questions which cannot be resolved from an exegetical or Old

³⁰ The Bible translation which started in Chile seems to be an indispensable aid where education and libraries are not available. This is especially the case for daily theological work where even the synopsis of two random Spanish translations has to be enough for those who do not know the context. Maybe the European research efforts which eventually led to the German *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* can be used as a theological and practical working basis, in spite of all the painful events of Christian history, both in Europe and the Americas.

³¹ “Und Gott sprach: Lasset uns Menschen machen, ein Bild, das uns gleich sei, die da herrschen über die Fische im Meer [...] Und Gott schuf den Menschen zu seinem Bilde, zum Bilde Gottes schuf er ihn; und schuf sie als Mann und Frau. Und Gott segnete sie und sprach zu ihnen: Seid fruchtbar und mehret euch und füllet die Erde und machet sie euch untertan.” (Lutherbibel 1984).

³² Cf. Spanish version: “Entonces Dios creó a Adán, los seres humanos, como imagen divina; como imagen de Dios son creados, masculino y femenino. Él, Ella, Dios les creó.” (Sabine Dievenkorn, Ximena Sanhueza, work group CTE, Concepción 2012, unpublished material).

Testament standpoint, but are of a systematic or dogmatic-theological nature. In addition to linguistic analysis, they require ethical discourses. Semantic-syntactical considerations as well as contextual deliberations regarding past and present are necessary. Above all this interdisciplinary enterprise requires practical-theological discretion. Within the classical theological disciplines, this is mainly provided by practical theology, which is able to raise questions regarding practical or rather cultural contexts *theologically*, just like it is able to express theological contexts in a practical, i.e. *culture-bound* fashion. It does this with dialectically interactive responsibility. This is the strength of practical theology. And at the same time it marks its boundaries.

The Bible in Just Language – A Fact

The Hebrew original for “responsible” (שָׁבֵב) is a term that stands for the execution of force – the act of rape – in other places in the Bible.³³ Even though one may find different answers to the question which context provides the interpretation template for the other, it is clear that the context is one of militant nature and an act of violence. The German “*untertan machen*” (in English “force it into submission!”; in Gen 1:28 this refers to the Earth) is trying to reflect that. The translators decided against the political partisanship of environmental responsibility. With the English term “responsible”, preference was given to the ecclesiastic paradigm of safeguarding creation. The not only eschatological awareness of our time that “There is no Heaven or Earth”³⁴ here a political, environmental, social, and ethical commandment becomes a biblical hemistich in Genesis. I think this is important. And I think it is correct, biblically and theologically. The Chilean version translates: “Serán fructíferos, y se reproducirán y llenarán la tierra. Tienen el poder y la capacidad de ser responsables de los peces del mar y de las aves del cielo, y los animales que andan por la tierra.” (“You will fill the earth and you will be responsible for it...”). Given Latin-American Spanish syntax (which does not mention the second person plural), the impact of the imperative is modified and a cultural context in which the earth, *la Pacha-Mama*, has her own dignity, is respected. But it leads to many questions which require answers. Biblically and theologically.

³³ Cf. שָׁבֵב in Esther 7:8. It poses the question which context the “original” came from and to which it was transferred.

³⁴ Cf. Leonardo Boff’s explications about “Sin tierra no hay cielo” in his book Leonardo Boff, *La opción-Tierra: La solución para la tierra no cae del cielo* (Sal Terrae: Petrópolis 2008).

Technical Questions to Promote a Dream Project

A deduction: what happens to the Holy Scripture, if words are changed depending on ethical and political principles? Or is it simply the context which changes, but the content stays the same and thus becomes visible again in the change? Has it ever been translated differently? Is there any translation without interpretation at all? In other words: is it even possible to create a translation without economic and social dependencies? But how could it even be possible in light of the cultural context, the time-dependency of language, and the inevitable subjectivity of choosing words?

However, can we actually conclude – after rightfully answering this question in the negative – that, while using the statements’ context ties, imperatives which are ethically up-to-date should now replace the agrarian images of the Bible? What obligations do the commandments hold if that is the case? For 2000 years we have conquered the Earth and now, suddenly, we feel we are responsible for it? Or have we always been responsible for what we conquer, which can also be proven from a context-analytical standpoint?³⁵ What is the consequence of the realization that the antiquated “to conquer” means “to protect” in modern language? Do we need a footnote which re-interprets “conquer”?³⁶ Or would it be better to include a footnote which explains the newly used “protect” and the lost “conquer”?³⁷ Does anything really need to be explained in footnotes? Can the translators use footnotes to extricate themselves from the suspicion of working ideologically? And: if all this freedom is possible in translation, where and which are the boundaries? Do these boundaries dissolve or do they merely move, if we eliminate the oppressive potential of the Bible, as shown in the examples above? Where are the criteria that determine boundaries and possibilities? What remains of Martin Luther’s “sola scriptura” if we must ask anew what “Scripture” actually is, from a Protestant point of view?³⁸

³⁵ Cf. e.g. socio-economical examinations of the so-called slaveholder society in antiquity.

³⁶ This is what the *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* does: in Ulrike Bail, Frank Crüsemann, Marlene Crüsemann et al. (eds.), *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2006), 2280; a detailed explanation for Gen 1:28, also in Bail, Crüsemann, Crüsemann et al., *Bibel in gerechter Sprache*, 2nd ed., is amended.

³⁷ This is what the *Inclusive Bible* does (cf. Priests for Equality, *The Inclusive Bible*, 5).

³⁸ “Sola scriptura” is one of the four theological keywords of Reformation in Germany according to Martin Luther; it underlines that he separates himself from tradition, i.e. history, as a source of revelation aside from Holy Scripture.

And who can decide? Is the historical authority of those who determine the boundaries of the church(es) enough? Or is the ministry of all people of faith on par with the Protestant “sola scriptura”? Would this mean that all members of a church or ultimately any man or woman can decide? And the questions go even further: what does “original” really mean in this context? What is the proto-text, given that all editions of Greek and Hebrew texts available today are collections, which have never before existed as collections? What would be the consequences for those theologies which are based on verbal inspiration? And what would be the consequences in the model of spiritual inspiration? Does the latter make new translations redundant? This incomplete list of questions just represents a rough map for the search for possibilities and boundaries, between responsibility and reverie, faith and ideology. It provokes a new theology and a new practice through which men and women try to find a new path taking responsibility before God and humankind.

A Practical-theological Description of an Interdisciplinary Consideration

“Jesus war Pole, Jude dazu, Jesus war ein Schwarzer und kam aus Peru...”³⁹
– “Jesus was a Pole, and also a Jew, Jesus was Black and came from Peru”, sang Bettina Wegner in former East Germany in the early 1980s. From a poetic standpoint it does not seem to be important where the stories of the New

³⁹ In 1981 Bettina Wegner, songwriter in former East Germany, was ahead of her time with her songs about the inclusiveness of theological paradigms: “Jesus – Was würde sein, wenn es Jesus wirklich gibt, von dem jeder behauptet, daß er ihn liebt, Und er steigt zu uns runter, uns zu befreien, was ihm da passierte in unserm Verein, das stell ich mir vor und dann wird mir ganz leer, Kein Mensch erkennt ihn, wenn er unter uns wär. Ein silberner Mercedes und ein schwarzer BMW fahrn mit blutigen Reifen durch klaren Schnee, Jesus – steig nie herab, du kriegst keine Wohnung und vom Kuchen nichts ab, Du kriegst keine Arbeit und du kommst in den Knast weil du radikal und leise Widerstand geleistet hast. Denn Jesus war Pole und Jude dazu Jesus war ein Schwarzer und kam aus Peru Jesus war Türke und Jesus war rot. Mensch Jesus, bleib oben, sonst schlagen die dich tot!” (Jesus – What would it be like, if Jesus really existed, he whom everyone professes to love, and he comes down to us, to free us, what would happen to him in our society, I imagine it and I feel empty inside, nobody would recognize him, if he was among us. A silver Mercedes and a black BMW are driving with bloody tires through the clear snow, Jesus will never come down, you won’t find an apartment and no slice of the cake, you don’t find work, and you will go to jail, because you put up resistance radically and quietly. Because Jesus was a Pole and also a Jew, Jesus was Black and came from Peru. Jesus was a Turk and Jesus was red. Listen Jesus, stay up there, otherwise they’ll beat you dead! [my translation]). Bettina Wegner, *Die Lieder 1978-81*, Vol. 1, Audio CD, 1997.

Testament originate, whether at the Sea of Galilee or at Lake Titicaca. But how interchangeable are Palestine and Tibet?

Not just in El Salvador do people paint wooden crucifixes in many colors and picture Jesus as an indigenous fellow countryman of the impoverished farmers. The so-called “Hungertücher” (Lenten veils) often represent Jesus as a Haitian, an African, etc.⁴⁰ But only very few have dared to paint a woman at his side.⁴¹ Apparently there are certain boundaries. Not only exegetical ones, but also with regard to ecclesial hierarchy. Therefore the Catholic differentiation between an acceptable “horizontal inclusive language” and a definitively unacceptable “vertical inclusive language”⁴² leads to more than just theological problems. In order to preserve the integrity of tradition, which in addition to Scripture is the source of divine revelation in Catholic theology, a theological principle is formally introduced which becomes the guideline for translation. From an analytical standpoint this also represents a severe interference in the translation effort. Conservative and protective views permit only partial innovation.

God remains masculine, albeit asexual, and Christ can and does not want to be regarded as female. Certain text passages show quite clearly how this can be extremely difficult. An example: the English *Inclusive Bible* translates Gen 1:26–28 as: “Let us make humankind in our image, to be like us [...] Humankind was created as God’s reflection: in the divine image God created them, female and male, God made them.” The German *Bibel in gerechter Sprache* reads: “Wir wollen Menschen machen – als unser Bild, etwa in unserer Gestalt [...] Da schuf Gott Adam, die Menschen, als göttliches Bild, als Bild Gottes wurden sie geschaffen, männlich und weiblich, hat er, hat sie, hat Gott sie geschaffen”, which is in English: “Let us make humans – in our

⁴⁰ Cf. Jacques Chéry’s Lenten veil from 1982; for an illustration see: <http://www.acrossthe bible.eu/schoepfung/Hungertuch.html>, 2.6.2012.

⁴¹ Cf. the exposition “Santa Libertad!: Memoria y olvido de la imagen femenina de la independencia” at the Museo de Independencia in Bogota for the Bicentenario of Colombia, June 2010, dedicated to the contribution of Christian (mainly Catholic) women to the country’s autonomy and independence. Its poster shows a cross, but on the cross you do not see Christ as usual but a woman: a bronze figure of Policarpi Salavarría, a saint of the city of Bogota from the 19th or early 20th century, is nailed to the cross as a representative of many women. Cf. Jaime de Almeida, “Santa Librada, Patrona del Día 20 de Julio, en el primer centenario de la independencia de Colombia”, in: http://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/52/96/80/PDF/AT5_Almeida.pdf, 2.4.2012, pictures on pages 2 (383) and 14 (395).

⁴² Cf. sources and explanations on <http://cba.cua.edu/clif.cfm>, 2.6.2012.

image, in our shape [...] Then God created Adam, the human beings, as a divine image, they were created in the image of God, male and female did he, did she, did God create them.” A Protestant version of the inclusive translation is not bound to the Catholic commandment regarding horizontal or vertical inclusiveness. Consequently the image of human beings as man and woman is projected onto the proto-image of God with both masculine and feminine aspects and characteristics.

The Catholic establishment of boundaries marks a cultural-theological challenge in its own way, which not only requires painstaking exegetical reflection but also analytical and practical theological thought, which in the end leads to much larger questions than the previous deduction. Simply put: what remains if God is also female and Jesus becomes a daughter?

A Practical-theological Description of a Multi-cultural Consideration

At first glance such questions seem heretical, but they are motivated by the yearning for a history of God which is written *with* us, not just *for* us, and that also applies to women.⁴³ In the historically authentic tradition, as far as we can remember, God’s story has been written and created or determined by men: the hitherto existing literature of the Bible, the classical literature of theology, is an example. Women are therefore long overdue to write theology and history in their own words – including biblical history. The past gives us the right to do so.

However, when women begin to write, not only the form of address changes. The notion of God changes as well. How could it be any different? But once the notion of God changes, once humankind no longer exploits and oppresses the Earth, but instead keeps and protects it, theology changes as well. The church changes. Christendom changes. And that includes much more than the liturgically correct address “Dear sisters and brothers” and it does not end with the theological question of why Satan is not female.⁴⁴ Boundaries which used to represent a safe home dissolve.

⁴³ This obviously also applies to all other excluded people, made invisible or only implied, such as non-Whites or non-heterosexuals. It becomes interesting when one asks what happens to those who were not thought of at all, because their existence was not known at the time of writing.

⁴⁴ Jens Schröter, “Der Teufel bleibt männlich”, in: Dalferth, *Bibel in gerechter Sprache?*, 1-30, here 17. See also: Elisabeth Gössmann, Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, Helene Schüngel-Straumann (eds.), *Der Teufel blieb männlich: Kritische Diskussion zur Bibel in gerechter Sprache: Feministische, historische und systematische Beiträge* (Neukirchner Verlag: Neukirchen-Fluyn 2007).

To maintain that the Holy Scripture is not just a product of history, but also the mirror of a culture, means not only that much of it can be written differently, but also that it can or must be lived differently.⁴⁵ It is not simply a question of translation whether we construct a path for God or make his or her tracks visible.⁴⁶

If each of today's religions is a collection of testimonies of faith, which we encounter in the vesture of various cultural testimonies, doors to new rooms open and new rights are established, including rooms and rights of reception. For example, if the liturgical year and its Easter cycle no longer follow the astronomical constellations of the North, Good Friday and Easter Sunday would also be a festival of the rising sun in the southern hemisphere. If Christmas does no longer have to coincide with Jesus's historical birthday, Jesus can also appear as Christ and light in the darkness in the southern hemisphere – and he can do so in June.

How much can we scrape off the traditional image of Jesus with the legitimate argument that his image is a registered object of cultural value? He is allowed to be Black, but can he also be gay? This question abruptly makes us aware of boundaries, especially those which are based solely on resentments, even in the guise of a theological argument.

Translation is not risk-free, because language is never innocent. Not even the language of the biblical proto-texts. Words create realities. They create theological dogmas, ethical norms, and civil laws, as the term “Jungfrau” (“virgin”, literally “young woman”)⁴⁷ easily illustrates. An inclusive Bible translation is a first step on the way to an inclusive Christendom. But without boundaries there are no possibilities.

“Wer für alles offen ist, kann nicht ganz dicht sein.” This German wordplay, which cannot be directly translated, loosely means “If you have a completely

⁴⁵ Wilhelm Gräb argues that there was a first religion before the Christian religion that functions as a lens through which we look at the second, the Christian religion. A basic dogma of this first religion and this lens is the believe in a benevolent God. It is with this axiom that Christians open the Bible. We read, interpret, and translate it. We consider certain things important, others not so much, we find hope and faith in the centuries-old dust-covered traces of the Holy Scripture. Cf. Wilhelm Gräb about the belief in a good God, *Praktische Theologie und protestantische Kultur* (Gütersloher Verlagshaus: Gütersloh 2002).

⁴⁶ Cf. Mark 1:4. The preliminary Spanish translation: “Una voz exclama fuerte en el desierto: abran un camino para Dios, hagan visibles sus huellas.” (Sabine Dievenkorn, Natallia Salas, work group CTE, 2012, unpublished material).

⁴⁷ Mark 1:27.

open mind, you're bound to lose a few brain cells", i.e. you can't be totally sane. This was written on a wall in Berlin-Kreuzberg during the times of ideological integration debates in the early 1990s. At the time I considered it outrageous: I saw tolerance, openness, and inclusiveness as being one and the same. Nowadays I'm a bit more cautious. As a dedicated feminist, academic student, scientific researcher, and questioning seeker, I know now that inclusiveness is nullified, if it dissolves all boundaries. Differences that are disregarded or removed could signify a loss.

An inclusive Bible translation therefore does not mean a Bible which is smoothly adjusted to modern political requirements. It is rather an expression of a reformatory request⁴⁸ in search of a Christianity which is aware of its integrative potential from a practical-theological standpoint and in biblical language, where the female reader becomes a criterion on the journey from what is written to the final text.

“Entonces Dios creó a Adam, los seres humanos, como una imagen divina, fueron creados como una imagen de Dios, masculino y femenino, ambos fueron creados por Dios.” Esta nueva voz, extraña para muchos, herética para algunos, pero liberadora y alentadora para muchos otros. Una traducción bíblica que pueda ser vista como más justa, precisa e inclusiva hace visible lo que antes no lo fue, elucida lo que pudo no ser distinguido o sí quiso ser advertido, comprendido o comunicado. Pero esto también plantea varios interrogantes, no sólo respecto de la naturaleza de una pedagogía y enseñanza-aprendizaje bíblica sino, y especialmente, respecto de su naturaleza transversal teórico-práctica. La pedagogía escolar teológica y junto a la traducción interdisciplinaria multicultural en el contexto de América Latina recién se ha iniciado ha comenzado, y dicho trabajo depende está posicionado en de un nuevo y peculiar discurso. Este constituye una iniciativa de un grupo de teólogas mujeres y no de una iglesia oficial. Esta característica le imprime al trabajo, estructural y simbólicamente, su rasgo liberador, su potencialidad para incluir. Un grupo de teólogas feministas de Chile, país evangelizado que ha perdido sus propias ligazones con la misión, está intentando ofrecer una traducción distinta y pertinente para estos tiempos actuales, pretendiendo ser una voz en el coro de lo que ya se viene haciendo preteridamente. Si cada una de las religiones que existen actualmente es una recopilación de testimonios de fe que se nos presenta bajo la vestidura de diferentes testimonios culturales, se nos abren nuevos espacios y derechos. Espacios y derechos de la recepción. Si el año litúrgico y su ciclo pascual dejaran de orientarse por las constelaciones astronómicas del Norte, entonces el

⁴⁸ “Ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda est.” Martin Luther according to Jodocus van Lodenstein.

Viernes Santo y el Domingo de Resurrección serían una celebración del sol creciente también en el hemisferio sur. Si la Navidad ya no tuviera que ser un cumpleaños histórico, entonces Jesús el Cristo podría aparecer como la luz en la oscuridad también en el hemisferio sur, y esto en junio.

“Then God said, ‘Let us make human beings – in our image, to be like us.’ Then God created Adam, human beings, in the image of God they were created, male and female he created them, she created them, God created them.” This sounds new, strange for most, heretical for others, but liberating for many and, above all, courageous: including them. A female, feminine part becomes linguistically visible where the feminine had remained invisible so far – and this entirely against the text that mentions the female human being – woman – explicitly. If God created the human being both masculine and feminine it is, for our common linguistic understanding, not the same as when man is created, as male and female. A Bible translation attempting to be just, e.g. inclusive in this sense, makes evident that which was not visible before, elucidates that which could not be seen or did want to be seen. The scholarly theological and multiculturally interdisciplinary translation work in the Latin American context has started. This work is dependent, aside from contextual connections, on this particular new discourse. A group of female theologians from Chile, a missionized country that has lost its own religions with the mission, is attempting to offer a separate translation relevant to present times. The starting point of this project is thus initially its own contextual theology that quite often exists as oral tradition and everyday practice only and thus initially appears to be outside the academic context. If every religion we have today is a collection of testimonies of faith that we encounter in the form of different cultural testimonies, then this opens new spaces and rights. Spaces and rights of reception as well. If the ecclesiastical year and its Easter cycle stop using northern astronomical constellations as a guide, then Good Friday and Easter Sunday could be a celebration of the rising sun in the southern hemisphere too.

“Da sprach Gott, wir wollen Menschen machen – als unser Bild, etwa in unserer Gestalt [...] Da schuf Gott Adam, die Menschen, als göttliches Bild, als Bild Gottes wurden sie geschaffen, männlich und weiblich, schuf er sie, schuf sie sie, schuf Gott sie.” Das klingt neu, fremd für die meisten, häretisch für manche, für viele aber befreiend und mutig und vor allem: sie einschließend. Eine in diesem Sinne gerechte bzw. inklusive Bibelübersetzung macht sichtbar, was nicht zu sehen war oder nicht gesehen werden wollte oder konnte. Aber sie wirft Fragen auf. Die sind nicht nur biblisch-wissenschaftlicher Natur, sondern vor allem transversaler praktisch-theologischer Art. Die wissenschaftlich theologische und multikulturell interdisziplinäre Arbeit im lateinamerikanischen Kontext hat begonnen und ist neben kontextuellen Bezügen auf den Diskurs angewiesen. Eine Theologinnengruppe aus Chile unternimmt den Versuch, in einem missionierten Land, in dem mit der

Mission die eigenen Religionen verloren gingen, eine gegenwartsbezogene eigene Übersetzung anzubieten, die eine Stimme sein will im Chor der bereits existierenden. Ausgangspunkt dieses Projektes ist daher zunächst die eigene kontextuell verankerte Theologie, die nicht selten nur als mündliche Tradition und gelebte Praxis existiert und sich damit zunächst außerhalb des akademischen Kontextes zu befinden scheint. In dem man und vor allem Frau sich neben den vorliegenden aktuellen Ausgaben der Biblischen Texte in den Ursprachen, auch an der deutschsprachigen Bibel in gerechter Sprache orientiert, wird der Versuch unternommen, sich die in Europa bereits geleistete theologisch-akademische Arbeit zu Nutze zu machen. Das Projekt einer Bibelübersetzung in eine gerechtere Sprache ist eine Initiative von theologisch arbeitenden Frauen. Es ist keine Kirchengauftragsarbeit. Darin liegen strukturell wie symbolisch sein befreiendes Moment und sein kulturtheologisches Potential. Wenn jede Religion, die wir heute haben, eine Sammlung von Glaubenszeugnisse ist, die uns im Gewand unterschiedlicher Kulturzeugnisse begegnet, eröffnet das neue Räume und Rechte. Auch Räume und Rechte der Rezeption. Wenn sich das Kirchenjahr und sein Osterkreis nicht länger an den astronomischen Konstellationen des Nordens orientieren, dann wäre Karfreitag und Ostersonntag auch auf der Südhalbkugel ein Fest der aufsteigenden Sonne. Wenn Weihnachten kein historischer Geburtstag mehr sein muss, dann kann Jesus als Christus auch auf der Südhalbkugel als das Licht in der Dunkelheit erscheinen – und das im Juni.

Sabine Dievenkorn studierte Mathematik, Physik, Theologie, spricht vier Sprachen, ist Lehrerin und Pfarrerin und arbeitet derzeit als Professorin für Praktische Theologie und Gender an der evangelischen Fakultät der Comunidad Teológica de Chile in Concepción. Berufliche Erfahrungen sammelte die in der DDR Geborene in Europa, Asien, Südafrika, Arabien und den Amerikas.