SIL Global
Language and Culture Archives

Journal of Translation
ISSN 1558-7282 (online)
https://siljot.org

A Religious Ethics of Translation: The Love Command

Alan J. E. Wolf

Journal of Translation 11 (1), 2015: 61–73.
https://doi.org/10.54395/JOT-9E82X

License

©2015, SIL Global

Made available under Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0

More resources available at:
https://sil.org/resources/language-culture-archives

A Religious Ethics of Translation: The Love Command

Alan J. E. Wolf

Alan Wolf is a lecturer in translation studies and intercultural communication at the University of East Anglia (Norfolk, UK). He has experience as a translator of academic and religious texts, and has written widely on translation studies and interfaith dialogue. His period of training for the priesthood in the Church of England has led him to explore the place of a religious ethics in all forms of translated discourse.

Abstract

Our understanding of ethics in the field of translation studies shows a secular bias which has distorted our moral vision. This article examines recent accounts of the role of ethics when communication is translated by interpreters and translators. Rather than relying on professional codes or relativist approaches, the potential value in adopting a religious perspective to our understanding of ethics is underlined, reclaiming the spiritual dimension of moral action and reconceptualising notions of the Other, power and ideology in translation. Examples are given from the literature in the field of contemporary translation studies.

1. Introduction

Many of the contemporary debates that have preoccupied researchers working in the fields of intercultural communication and translation have ignored the deep theological soil in which they were rooted. While it was thought for a long time that morality without religion was not possible, secular philosophers now defend morality without religion and some openly criticise religious ethics (Hebblethwaite 1982:vii). As Stackhouse and Miller (2012:239) recently observed in their assessment of ethics in the business world, "the problem is that theological and ethical assessments…have largely accepted secular, materialist and political views of our past. That perception has distorted our moral vision."

In this paper I will attempt to consider seriously the secular distortion of moral teaching in the field of translated communication. First, I will give some attention to the contemporary understanding of ethics when communication is mediated by interpreters and by translators. I will then offer an alternative perspective based on a religious understanding of ethics "in the positive ideal of individual and common life which it sets before mankind, and in the spiritual resources which it holds to be given to men and women for the realisation of that ideal" (Hebblethwaite 1982:vii). Finally, I will propose that spiritual resources motivate translators and interpreters to realise ideal forms of mediated communication which professional codes of ethics manifestly fail to do.

2. The Place of Ethics in Contemporary Translation and Intercultural Communication

The recent interest in anything to do with ethics in translation is shown in the proliferation of articles on the subject. In a special issue of the journal, *The Translator*, Pym proclaimed the return of translation studies to ethics as if he were heralding a new and more moral age than whatever preceded it. Pym (2001:129) argues that this is now a "very general social trend" related to decision-making beyond the individual and national level. He admits that few translation scholars agree about how to define the field of ethics, and reviewing the articles in the special issue, he outlines Chesterman's (2001) proposal for a Hieronymic[1] oath based on four ways of talking about ethics in translation: the ethics of representation, the ethics of service, an ethics of communication, and a norm-based ethics. I have found this to be a useful starting point from which to evaluate current debates in research about the role of ethics in translation.

[1] The word "Hieronymic" relates to St Jerome, the patron saint of translators.

First, the ethics of representation concerns the responsibility of the translator in representing the source text or the source author. Representation can also be understood very differently in terms of the translation rendering a commercial service to a client, i.e. the ethics of service (Chesterman 2001:140). As Chesterman observes, on the basis of an ethics of service, a translator is "deemed to act ethically if the translation complies with the instructions set by the client." To Christiane Nord (2001) ethics is a translator's loyalty to the clients, the original writer and the target readers. Similarly, an ethics of service applies to the work of Bulut and Kurultay in the same volume (2001) in the context of interpreting in situations of conflict and disaster. Here, Pym argues that the ethics of service prevail over the ethics of representation and the codes of professional ethics. He concludes that what is at stake is a "very humanist giving of the Self to the Other, in the name of what are unashamedly called…universal values" (Pym 2001:132).

This emphasis on treating the target text as a person, i.e. focusing on a "relation with people rather than texts" (Pym 2001:133), Chesterman refers to as an ethics of communication. Such an approach emphasises not just representing others, but communicating with the Other as the "primary ethical act" (Chesterman 2001:140, citing Levinas 1982). This view that the ethical translator is a mediator who achieves cross-cultural understanding (Chesterman 2001:141), is represented by Pym as an "ethics of alterity" (Pym 2001:133), seen by many (e.g., Gouanvic [2001], Laygues [2001], and Nord [2001]), as going beyond a notion of ethics as a professional code. But Chesterman rightly asks, "What does this understanding of the 'Other' rely on?" His answer is that it relies on "the understanding of texts, messages, signs, intentions and meanings" (Chesterman 2001:141). He shows how closely the ethics of communication depends on, and ultimately derives from, the ethics of representation. Indeed, Pym himself is critical of a position which would involve noting the shortcomings of professional codes whilst simply moving on to "higher ideological realms." Rather, he advocates a reversal of that approach consisting in "establishing the kind of general relation to be obtained," then "generalising terms and principles for a multiplicity of professional relations." His main argument for this seems to be that humanist ideals can be nothing more than "pretty words," "symbols without the power of professional groups most prepared to enact ethics as a practice" (Pym 2001:133).

The last category, norm-based ethics, addresses the issue of moral relativism. The example of a Turkish interpreter translating the German Red Cross as the German Red "Crescent" in order to save lives in an earthquake is presented as "ethically correct" (Pym 2001:135) in view of the "norms…of that specific situation." Pym observes that "something vaguely ethical can be construed from the empirical." His conviction throughout is that abstract principles are of little use if they "do not take root in the historical reality of what translators do" (Pym 2001:136). He then derives the following ethical principles:

1. The concerns of linguistic fidelity, of transmitting source text to target text, are broadened to include higher levels of fidelity between individuals.
2. Ethics is an issue dependent on practice within specific cultural contexts and situational determinants.
3. The fact of, and specific conditions of, the researcher in a given social situation, are taken into consideration.
4. There is an assumption of universal values and general causes as superior to immediate and common causes.

The review ends on a relativist note with Pym owning that there are no "neat answers" to the questions he has discussed. His earlier call for a professional ethics issuing from "the power of professional groups most prepared to enact ethics as a practice," gives way, oddly enough, to the pretty phrases he distrusted so avowedly, e.g. "disagreement is a good reason for dialogue" and "the growing respect of the Other" (Pym 2001:138). One wonders what he means by these, especially when one considers the earlier unease he expressed about humanist ideals.

If the material I have just reviewed shows us anything, it is the level of fluidity not to say wooliness that exists about ethics in the field of translated communication. A simple discussion of ethics with my graduate students in a course on translation theory reveals to me the extent to which they view the act of translating as an unproblematic rendering of a message from one language into another helped by a neutral conduit, i.e. the translator/interpreter. The gist of their response was that whatever work they were briefed to undertake, e.g. advertising that promotes smoking, translation work for the military, they would accept it invoking the

following reasons: they did not write/publish the source text so translating it has no ethical implications; somebody else will do it if they do not; it is important that the text be translated so as not to deprive others access to it. Given this unconscionable response from future translators, one would seem justified in asking if anything can be done to motivate them to take the ethical dimension of their work seriously.

3. Professional Codes and Ideals

On the basis of the above approaches to translational ethics, two main options seem to present themselves to us. The first one is to recommend a professional Code of Ethics (see the American Translators Association). However, codes are perceived to be of limited application to the multiplicity of ethical problems a translator may encounter in real situations. We are told that "codes and legal framework are unable to keep pace and to cover all scenarios" (Drugan 2011:39). Gouanvic (2001:205), having studied the Québec Order of Certified Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters (OTTIAQ), concludes that the code "does not refer to translation as an interlingual activity" and includes qualities required of a translator that are not specifically to do with translation and would be valid for any service profession. The only exception is the reference to translator's integrity, but the OTTIAQ code takes this virtue for granted and does not, in any sense, address its complexity.

The other reticence one may feel in relation to codes is that they are not designed solely to encourage members of a profession to behave ethically, but by powerful institutions, in order to be prudent. The intention can be summarised thus, "if you behave that way, you are more likely to avoid litigation than if you do not, and the organisation you work for will support you."[2]

A second approach to translational ethics is suggested by Drugan who proposes, for example, that one first make sure that the laws and codes are interpreted intelligently, and that when "codes cannot prescribe the very specific responses that are needed…behaving ethically will mean reaching different conclusions for different individuals" (Drugan 2010:39).

The problem with these accounts of translators' responses to an ethical problem is that, when you apply a set of rules specific to a profession and that fails, you fall back on the ethics of communication, focusing on the particular situation and the individual response.

As a translator or an interpreter, you may well feel abandoned at this point by the lack of contemporary theorising on ethics, and you may be justified in asking the question, "is this what arriving at a moral judgement means, relying on my individual response to a particular situation?" Following the Cambridge theologian Hebblethwaite (1982:66), I see this tension as a question of faith, "Are men alone in the Universe and able only to inspire and encourage each other with ideals of life, or are there resources beyond their own that make for the transformation and eventual perfection of human beings and human community?"

In what follows, I will try to formulate a possible answer to this question based on a theological understanding of how the human community of translators may be motivated to act with more than ideals of life.

4. A Religious Perspective on Morality: A Focus on the Personal Will and a Situated Ethics

A discussion of religious ethics is an attempt to show how distinctive the religious dimension is from an ethical system that does not involve recourse to religion. The first thing that must be said is that I am not restricting my understanding of religious ethics to that of Christianity. The references to the New Testament are meant as general reflections on an ethical position which involves belief in God.[3]

What then makes a religious understanding of morality distinctive? First and foremost, argues Ward, being moral is "to respond emotionally, volitionally and cognitively to the reality of God" (Ward 1976:11). But

[2] Please note that ethics policies in universities often specify that the ultimate responsibility for the ethical nature of the research rests with the researcher and not the university, one way of saying Pontius Pilate-style, if you do anything that leads to litigation even though you've been approved ethically by us, you are on your own.

[3] The tradition with which I am most familiar, having undergone priestly training in the past, is that of Anglicanism and I will in later parts of the discussion show how my position is influenced by that tradition.

what does this all-embracing response to God consist in? Precisely because it takes over one's whole being, this response is intensely personal and located in the individual's will. The ethical life in the New Testament is not, unlike much of what we find in the above-mentioned discussions, a legalistic or abstract code of conduct. As Carpenter (1961:28) observes, there are no "general principles of moral behavior," and no "set of moral principles waiting to be inspected" (Ward, 1976:34). Rather, the New Testament prefers to concern itself with particular events and how Jesus reacts to them, e.g. the woman about to be stoned because of her adultery, the running out of wine at a wedding, the betrayal of one of his disciples and so on. This is not to say that there are no rules of morality at all, for such repudiation, known as antinomianism, would involve setting oneself above any moral law on the spurious assumption that one is saved and inspired by the Holy Spirit.[4] Between moral antinomianism of this kind and the legalism we have observed in contemporary theorising, the approach to decision-making I shall adopt is referred to as situation ethics (Fletcher 1967:31). This moral strategy is "a method of situational or contextual decision-making" (Fletcher 1966:11), the word "contextual" applying to any situation "with all its contingencies and exigencies" (Fletcher 1967:31).

A situation ethics, then, opposes legalism because it responds to the many facets of a particular situation in its full complexity. In particular, it contends that values are never intrinsically valuable, for "anything, material or immaterial is 'good' because it is good for or to somebody" (Fletcher 1966:51). In the words of Brunner (1947:194), there are no values "apart from persons." This means that a situationist regards all moral principles as maxims to be suspended if the context requires it. By that precept, it would have been a loving act to murder Hitler, as indeed the theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, imprisoned by the dictator planned to do, saying, "Principles are only tools in the hands of God, soon to be thrown away as unserviceable" (cited in Fletcher 1967:32).

4.1. Agape love, the directing of the human will to moral action

Situationists are sometimes accused of being relativists. In the sense that to be relative is to be relative to *something*, they are. As Fletcher (1966:44) explains, there must be a norm that is absolute, if there is to be any relativity at all. The immovable character of this absolute ethical principle is reflected in the command to love. Love, or the Greek concept of *agape*, offers a principle of ethics that maintains an eternal universal element, which Fletcher (1966:69) describes as being "goodwill at work in partnership with reason." There is no definition of *agape* because there is no higher principle by which it can be defined. "It is life itself in its actual unity" (Tillich 1963:94). *Agape* can be defined in terms of what it is not, i.e. it is not the love one has for friends, *philia*, or romantic love *eros*, because both of these loves include some, and exclude others, and *agape* can be given to all, even to your enemies (Luke 6:32–35). Although *agape* can be emotional as in the selfless love of a mother for her child, emotions are not its effective principle, but the will is (Fletcher 1966:79).

What has sometimes been referred to as the "primacy of love" (Barton 2012:57) can be viewed then, not as an ephemeral feeling but as something that needs to be worked on creatively as a flexible and ever-changing tool for the building of community and the well-being of others in society. It is, in Fletcher's words (1966:104), "the steady directing of the human will towards the eternal well-being of another."[5] As Ephesians 4:15 encourages believers to do, "Speak the truth in love," following the example of the apostles.

4.2. Grace, the transcendent driver of moral motivation

As we have seen, professional codes are often powerless in motivating individuals to transform themselves because the power of moral motivation does not lie in laws which are "compromises, unavoidable in view of the human predicament, but far removed from the true nature of the moral" (Tillich 1963:55). Since love,

[4] For more details on antinomianism, see Fletcher (1967:30), who further outlines the position as one strongly opposed by St Paul.

[5] How can religions founded on love perpetrate the horrors of the Crusades and 9/11, some will ask? There is no glib answer to this except to recognise with utter sadness as Hebblethwaite (1982:97) did, that "man has it in him to abuse his best intentions," and it is possible that, without God's special grace, human beings are unable to realise the good as they yet perceive it to be.

like God, is transcendent and cannot be fully attained by human beings, what drives moral motivation and what relevance does it have to moral action in history?

The Christian love commandment is an obligation which is not derived from the contingencies and disunities of historic existence but from the "transcendent unity of essential reality" (Niebuhr 1936:223). In other words, human beings are unable to strengthen their will to act for the good by themselves. Niebuhr (1936:227) gives examples of acts of utter self-abnegation, e.g. the mother who sacrifices her life for her child, which are carried out because the individual is endowed with spiritual resources far beyond their own natural abilities under the pressures of a particular situation. These forces in life can only be described, he says (1936:228), as the grace of God. Grace, *charis*, *gratia* – "that which is given without prior merit and makes graceful to him to whom it is given" (Tillich 1963:61). This grace attitude is the driver of moral motivation, not the Kantian categorical imperative in its fearful majesty. Graces are gifts from the divine which depend on the human ability to receive them.

Grace is not a command because whoever has "the grace of loving a thing, a task, a person or an idea does not need to be asked to love" (Tillich 1963:61). There is, therefore, in receiving grace no compulsion and no act of will on the part of the individual. The idea of grace is related to that of healing in the sense that finally the rift between our essential (obedience, good will) and our actual existential natures (sin, ill will) is bridged. Conversely, as soon as grace is lost, the commanding law of codes takes over and produces the "painful experience of being unable to become what one could and what one should have become" (Tillich 1963:62). "Only by means of transcendent Grace is the individual able to overcome the rift between his essential and actual natures when 'healing power has appeared'" (Tillich 1963:64).

Morality, then, does not depend on any particular religion, for "it is religious in its essence" (Tillich 1963:64). The categories identified by Tillich – love as the ultimate source of the moral command, and grace as the power of moral motivation – clarify the relation between religion and morality.

5. Translation and Ethics: Some Examples

In this section I shall review four examples drawn from the literature on the ethics of translated communication, which make manifest the need for a religious perspective to be considered in this field. I shall first address two examples of communication between individuals where an interpreter was needed for a message to be transmitted. I shall then look at two more examples which involve translation between texts.

Example 1

The first example to which I should like to draw attention is that presented by Clifford (2004) in an article which tries to determine if fidelity to the message is necessarily ethical in the context of healthcare interpreting. It must be said, first, that the training of interpreters is based on a conduit model which requires them to act as a mere filter of information, "transferring [it] from practitioner to patient and back again with the utmost fidelity" (Clifford 2004:91). It is interesting to note how interpreters are portrayed by writers in the field of community interpreting. Angelelli (2004), for example, describes them as invisible, Metzger (1999) prefers the term neutral, and Bot (2005) that of translation machines. It does not take long to see how the use of such terminology applied to human beings takes away from the persons and reduces them to devices deprived of an inner voice of conscience. The example provided by Clifford illustrates the failings of the conduit model of interpreter training.

A female patient with almost no proficiency in English had recently moved to Canada. A few months after arriving in Canada, her husband became ill with (what he told his wife, was) leukemia, and passed away three weeks before her medical appointment – at which she required an interpreter. A short time after her husband's death, the patient had been told that her husband was having sexual contact with other men, and that he had died of AIDS. At a previous appointment, she gave a blood sample, and when she arrived at the surgery, waiting for results, she was in a state of bewilderment and fear. The physician entered while the interpreter was sitting with the patient. The physician sat down at his desk, picked up a printout, and abruptly said, "Yup, you're positive." The interpreter at that point felt that if she conveyed the physician's words literally, i.e. adopted a strict ethics of representation, the patient may undergo shock. The interpreter consequently altered the physician's words and translated, "I'm afraid that the tests are positive." Clifford (2004:91) noted that

when the interpreter told her trainer what strategy she had adopted, she was severely reprimanded by him. He maintained that the interpreter "should never do anything other than repeat in the other language, everything said that had been said, exactly as it was said. To do otherwise," he continued, "is not ethical."

Based on current research, Clifford (2004) gives three reasons why the conduit model of interpreter training is still prevalent. First, the conduit model is mainly used to train conference interpreters who have very little opportunity to engage with the individuals for whom they interpret (Wadensjö 1998). The second reason is a rejection of the opposite type of interpreting situation: in which friends and relatives make decisions, sometimes unwelcome, on behalf of the communication recipient, e.g., an overly engaging model used when interpreting for the Deaf. The last reason why the conduit model is so influential is that it is based on older "code model" theories of communication. This is when a message is encoded by the speaker, which is then decoded by a hearer, without taking non-linguistic contextual factors into consideration.

Following Chesterman's (2001) approach to ethics, Clifford categorises the conduit model as an ethics of representation, the primary aim of which is for the source text to be represented faithfully. He opposes the model by claiming that community interpreting is better suited to an ethics of communication (see Chesterman), which stresses the needs of the Other and concerns itself not so much with fidelity as with understanding. The phrases "understanding of Otherness" and "understanding of the difference in power" between the physician, an educated man, and a relatively powerless widowed mother, are present in Clifford's discourse, as it is in that of Chesterman and in Pym. The interpreter's working relationship with the healthcare practitioners is also looked at from the perspective of developing trust and of the interpreter's acting as a cultural informant. These intentions are laudable and spring from a deeply-felt concern with the Other.

There is, however, a sense in which these notions, possibly used because they are fashionable, lack content and generate more questions than they answer. It is not clear, for example, in what sense the widow represents Otherness any more than the physician does. And what does one do with a difference in power? What does power mean in those situations? Does one acknowledge it from the abstract perspective of the critical discourse analyst and then move on? Similarly, what is trust? And how does one develop it if there is none to start with? And what is trust between a physician and an interpreter? The lack of guidance offered to interpreters at this point may well lead them to fall back on the conduit model.

An understanding of this example from a religious ethical perspective yields fruits which the approaches of contemporary writings do not. The Other in the religious sense is the individual called to make an intensely personal response to God's moral demand, called to make sense of his essentially created nature who is loved and is commanded to love as the primary command, who is aware that healing comes from the knowledge of that graceful acceptance by God, whatever the hurt, whatever the trauma. What the interpreter did by tempering the physician's message was to respond with her whole person to the complexity of the situation, thus suspending the rule of the conduit model, shown in this case to be unserviceable. She showed instead the primacy of love, the ultimate source of the moral command and finally, in her response to the Other, offered healing through God's grace. Because we are created in God's own image, the Other is that very reflection of the *imago Dei*, the divine image which enjoins us to "see what kind of human good God wills in creation" (Ward 1976:89).

Religious ethics can also shed light as to what is meant by the question of differences in power between the physician and the widow. From a theological perspective, power is often described as authority. As Ward (1976:84) observes, authority can be vested in an individual, say, who has great skills in scientific research. This, he calls the "authority of advice" and contrasts it with the institutionalising of moral authority which is "always dangerous and dehumanizing." A person is given authority through his personal qualities, not through his office. To take a specifically Christian angle on this, this is what Jesus meant when he said, "But he that is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble himself shall be exalted" (Matthew 23:11–12). Following that great principle of reversal himself, Jesus washed the feet of his own disciples. To this day this principle is practised by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, with the most powerful clergymen taking their place at the back as they process down the aisle of a Church, and the more junior at the front. A religious understanding of the power differences between the physician and the widow embeds the situation within a theological narrative of servanthood, brokenness and

role reversal. On this view, it is unnecessary for the physician to be bound by the rigid codes and practices of the hospital's ethics policy. For these, as we have seen, do not ultimately motivate moral action. Instead, in considering the narrative of the life of Jesus, which ends in self-sacrificial giving on a cross, the physician would begin to discern, as Carpenter (1961:43) observes, the "meaning of messianic destiny." Jesus showed us the depths of brokenness in dying the most reviled of deaths. He abandoned himself to the will of God, and showed us what the fulfilled ethical life really means, i.e. living sacrificially throughout life (Carpenter 1961:43), in order to build, irrespective of the consequences, the Kingdom of God. This is the moment when we come to the realisation that the ethics of the Kingdom do not conform to the world of professional codes, "and whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25–28). The religious physician in his brokenness and aware of sacrificial living, symbolically washes the feet of the widow. In this consecrated role vested in him by his creator, the unthinking response, "Yup, you're positive," is in itself unthinkable. Paradoxically, the religious perspective does not make a fuss about the Other. The moral command to love her is unconditional and beyond discussion.

And yet, any moral agent would recognise that a tension exists between the strict sacrificial ethics of the Kingdom and the poverty of achievement in reality. Rowan Williams (2012:13) asked in the last few months of his role as Archbishop of Canterbury, "What does ethics of the Body of Christ consist in?" First, how does "any proposed action measure up to two concerns: How does it manifest the selfless holiness of God in Jesus Christ? And how can it serve as a gift that builds up the community called to show that holiness in its corporate life?" Williams continues, recognising that there comes a moment when "listening for Christ in the acts of another" is no longer possible, a moment when the other's acts so contradict the conception of the body of Christ that maintaining communion is no longer a reality. The example of not maintaining communion with one's church to which Williams refers is that of Bonhoeffer, who, with others, was convinced that the German protestant churches had, through their alliance with the German Reich, "cut at the heart of any imaginable notion of what Christ's body might mean" (Williams 2012:10). One encounters this rift in daily interactions, and in the above example the interpreter, although she does not necessarily articulate this fully, is painfully aware of the rift. It is as if she says in the words of Williams (2012:13), the body of Christ requires us "to turn from our confrontation in silence to the Christ we all try to look at; to say to one another... Do you see that? This is how I see him: can you see, too?"

Example 2

My second example is taken from Mona Baker's review of interpreters in the context of the war in Iraq. Her analysis of how interpreters are "narrated" by others involved in the war, i.e. the correspondents, the mainstream media, the local population and the military personnel, shows how interpreters retain their moral agency and exercise of power. Here, a number of perceptive observations are made about the kinds of moral decisions confronting interpreters and translators in a time of conflict. Throughout, Mona Baker is very cautious not to be seen to pass judgement on the activities of interpreters. The distinction she makes between victims and villains, for example, is based on how they are narrated by different sides in the conflict. The pro-western media often portray interpreters as "victims of the insensitivity and indifference of the military and politicians who exploit their skills" (Baker 2010:204). Baker also notes that media accounts do not "question their ethics or role in the unfolding conflict" (2010:205), but choose rather to focus on the status of the individual as victim.

When she turns to how interpreters are evaluated by their own society, she remarks, unsurprisingly, that they are often not perceived as victims – but as villains and collaborators who "deserve the same treatment as the invading army." The example that deserves our attention is that of a soldier who was forced by an Iraqi interpreter to degrade himself sexually in public, as reported in *The Independent* newspaper (Buncombe and Huggler 2004). Baker's conclusion to these repugnant events is that such reports "undermine the narrative of war-time interpreters and translators as victims who deserve our sympathy and protection" (2010:209). Of the perpetrators she says "they are depicted as villains, as willing participants in heinous crimes" (2010:209). She further talks of victims and villains as "abstract" and "polarising," "categories…readily embraced by all parties in situations of violent conflict" (2010:209).

On the question of how Iraqi interpreters translate, she quotes Palmer (2007:19) who observes that interpretation often takes the form of a summary, selectively communicating the gist of the message so that, she concludes, "they have considerable latitude as narrators and can influence the unfolding narrative in ways that are hardly acknowledged by their interlocutors." Lastly, she documents the interpreters' lack of linguistic ability to articulate the narrative of war. In many cases, since their linguistic proficiency is limited, they are unable to "reflect the complexities of the on-going conflict" (Baker 2010:217).

There is no doubt that Baker gives an exhaustive and enlightening description of the rigidly defined roles in which interpreters are cast. This last comment fails to give a morally complete vision of the interpreting phenomenon in situations of war. Baker uses metaphors drawn from the fields of narratology and fiction to account for what were all-too-real events and grim losses of life. In this respect, one of her last comments is telling: "their own actions – linguistic and non-linguistic – are partly constrained by the roles in which they are cast and simultaneous participants in, shaping the narrative of war as it unfolds" (Baker 2010:218).

On the understanding of moral agency as I have described it, such an analysis seems curiously distanced from the concrete ideals and miserable failures of life which are set before humankind in times of war. Do phrases such as "being cast for a part" and helping "to shape the narrative of war" really constitute acceptable analyses of an interpreter's involvement in public, sexual degradation? Here, words drawn from theological discourse must be brought in to fill the moral vacuum created by the language of narrative analysis. Religious ethics in this example perceives the interpreter as unquestionably contradicting the conception of the body of Christ, that is one which builds the community of love for the Other. Only through this acceptance of the inacceptable, of the brokenness of individuals who in some situations have it in them to abuse their own being and cut it off from the divine image, can there be a possibility of moving forward towards reconciliation. And only with God's *charis*, can human beings realise the good as they yet perceive it to be. By contrast, our contemporary secular academic discourse frequently allows us to sleep-walk through the moral field, giving real acts a narrative status, blurring the lines between fiction and the reality of sin.

Example 3

The question of morality, when it pertains to the translation of texts, is in some respects more difficult to address than questions of ethics in the context of interpreting. This is largely because translated texts are severed from their source, which makes the attribution of ethical responsibility less instantaneous. Besides, the lay understanding of the translator as a neutral filter of information is responsible for the widespread view that only the source text is subject to ethical considerations.

Gouanvic gives an example which is of interest here. He observes that the genre of English-speaking detective novels imported by the successful French series "Série Noire" in the French cultural space of the 1940s largely assimilated the source text into the target culture by introducing "strong features of spoken language," (2001:207). He then takes issue with Berman who would have insisted that such a translation was unethical on the basis that it was "hypertextual," i.e. more concerned with sense and general meaning than the letter of the text. For Berman (1984:118), free re-creation of a text fails to implement the contract which binds the translators to their originals, that is, the ethics of representation. But, argues Gouanvic, even though the "Série Noire" texts are clearly a French ethnocentric appropriation of the source text, they retain a "profound respect for…the significance of the source texts" (Gouanvic 2001:207). It is not initially clear what Gouanvic means by the preservation of significance of the source text. It is certainly nothing to do with whether a translation is a free adaptation of the source or a formal rendering of it.

The concept of what for Gouanvic is an ethical translation becomes clear when he refers to a fundamentally unethical translation, i.e. the 1944 translation of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* under the title *Grappes d'amertume*, "translated" under the aegis of the Nazi occupation. The "translation" contains numerous additions documented by Gouanvic (2001:208) intended to serve the interests of Nazi Germany. It is in this ideological sense that Gouanvic can state that "the significance of Steinbeck's text is completely diverted" (2001:209).

We note here concerns similar to the ones in the previous example related to interpreters providing an inaccurate summary of the officers' utterances. The ethics of translation are powerfully defined by Gouanvic (2001:209) in terms of the source and target texts entering into a relationship which he describes as a

"community of destinies." By this he means that the ethics of the target text depends on the ethical future and implications of the source. The ethics of translation is therefore determined before the translation operation comes into force, "it originates in the decision to translate" (Gouanvic 2001:209). In this sense, Gouanvic turns translators into sociologically- and morally-oriented agents carrying out actions in the literary field to "institute a relationship characterised by a 'community of destinies' with the source society."

Although no reference is made to the religious dimension, Gouanvic's presentation of translation as an act that involves translators as moral agents shares much with the ethical considerations I have propounded, except that the agency of the individual translator is referred to without being defined. In that moral decision to translate, the translator seems to have to weigh up future inferences as to what kind of future the source text may have. The unconditional nature of the imperative is considerably played down in Gouanvic's writings, and it is unclear what the source of the moral command might be. Nor is it made clear what motivates translators to institute a morally acceptable relationship with the source society.

Example 4

My last example related to the ethical dimension of translated texts is that of Christiane Nord. In an article entitled "Loyalty Revisited," she refers to the old terminology of "fidelity" and "faithfulness" as terms which describe a relationship, "holding between the source and target text as linguistic entities" (Nord 2001:195). By contrast, she says the notion of "loyalty" is meant to refer to "a social relationship between people." One may infer by this that loyalty is a relationship which holds between individuals rather than texts, but this is not strictly speaking the case. Nord talks about loyalty to someone's "communicative intentions" (2001:195), so that loyalty still seems to operate at the linguistic level. Notwithstanding the fact that it is notoriously difficult for authors to display an awareness of their own intentions, let alone for an outsider to ascertain an author's intention.[6]

Nord uses St Paul as an example of what she means by loyalty to communicative intent. Two thousand years after his works were composed Nord gives us an analysis of what the word *porneia* meant in New Testament Greek. It ranged, she says, from being translated as "prostitution" (1 Corinthians 6:18, 7:2), to "adultery" (Matthew 19:9) and "homosexuality" (Ephesians 4:19). Again, in most biblical translations, including the King James Version, this latter verse is translated as "lasciviousness" rather than "homosexuality." The advice given by Nord is that translators ought to be aware of the different contexts in which the word *porneia* was used to determine which meaning is intended by the author, i.e. presumably his communicative intentions. The word *porneia* can be translated as "homosexuality," for example, when one wants to draw an analogy with modern society. On the basis of such analogies, Nord and her colleagues decided to translate the word *porneia* as "sex" because the category sex in our contemporary culture is often used in collocation with words such as violence, commercialisation, etc. So whenever *porneia* appears in contexts where adultery and prostitution are mentioned, it is translated as "sex-driven behavior." To do so, argues Nord (2001:194) is not only to define your translation purpose explicitly but also to be loyal to the addressees and to St Paul. However, could it be that Nord is violating her own principle of loyalty by interpreting the passages based on a current cultural bias, as opposed to what the author intended?

The use of loyalty attached to the translational act has received some criticism by scholars like Toury (1995) and Vermeer (1996) who wish to safeguard the scientific status of Skopos theory. Vermeer (1996:107), for example, proposed that, "ethics must not be mixed up with general theoretical considerations about other subjects. Science should be value-free (*wertfrei*)" (Vermeer 1996:107).[7] The notion of loyalty is also

[6] The notion of intentionality has received much attention in post-modern writing. The generalisation that the acceptance of deconstruction inevitably leads to a total inability to work out an author's intention is, however, misleading. Derrida (1997:152) does not accept that deconstruction is a licence to nihilism. Rather he advocates a position which recognises the tensions and the difficulties of the interpretative process based on the recognition of intentions: "[deconstructive writing] consists in accepting, within certain limits – that is to say, in never entirely accepting – the givenness of a context, its closedness and its stubbornness [*sa fermeture et sa fermeté*]."

[7] The lack of an ethical dimension in Skopos theory, has been eloquently and justly criticised by Baker (2008:21–22) in the following terms, "We soon configure something like Skopos theory as a narrative in our minds: the theory evokes (for me at any rate) an industrialized, affluent society populated by clients and highly professional translators who belong to the same "world" as their clients, who are focused on professionalism and making a good living, and who are highly

criticised because it does not "surpass the immediate textual context" and does not address the translators' moral responsibility related to the reality beyond the bilateral commitment" (see Koskinen 2000:2).

Critics of "loyalty" have paid considerably less attention to cases when analogies with the target contemporary world go awry. The word homosexuality, for instance, as Boswell (1980:42) points out, was, "despite its air of antiquity" coined relatively recently in the 19th century by German psychologists in an attempt to categorise and eventually to criminalise hitherto uncategorised sexual activity between same-sex partners. To translate *porneia* as "homosexuality" is misleading and could cause a great deal of harm to the contemporary gay community at the hands of religious extremists. The word *porneia* in the New Testament is not clear, but as used by Jesus on two separate occasions (see Matthew 5:32, 19:9), it has the meaning of what later usage would refer to as "adultery" (Boswell 1980:115, footnote 74), and not "sex-driven behavior" (Nord 2001). In this sense, Nord's approach may encourage misreadings of source texts by ill-informed analogies being peddled as what the original text says. It is not clear either why the term loyalty is randomly chosen over that of the existing term of "fidelity." Fidelity, or faithfulness between persons, has the advantage of connoting an attitude of the person trusting in the Other as the reflection of the image of God. This faithfulness reveals the love for the translated person or text, the source of the moral command.

Finally, Nord refers to Luther's translation of Romans 3:28:

λογιζόμεθα	γὰρ	δικαιοῦσθαι	πίστει	ἄνθρωπον	χωρὶς	ἔργων	νόμου
We believe	indeed	is justified	by faith	man	without	the works	of the law

So halten wir nun dafür, daß der Mensch gerecht wird ohne des Gesetzes Werke, allein durch den Glauben.
Therefore, we conclude that man is justified without the deeds of the law, alone by faith.
Therefore, we conclude that man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. (King James Version)
(Luther 1984, as cited and translated by Nord 2001:199–200, with my interlinear translation)

The word "alone" was added by Luther – it is nowhere in the Greek original – sparking off a century-long controversy during the reformation concerning the relationship between faith and acts. Nord argues that a great deal of harm was done by Luther's translation to believers and she adds, in passing, that the translation was the result of Luther theological ideology. Without wanting to enter into the intricacies of the debate, it is clear that the inscription of *allein* 'alone' in the translation takes on an ethical dimension.

Here, we may want to quote from Venuti, who observes that the examination of source and target texts when the target text has been manipulated must take into account "the cultural and social conditions of their interpretation. The evaluation must be shifted to another level that seems to me properly ethical: in inscribing an interpretation, a translation or adaptation can stake out an ethical position and thereby serve an ideological function in relation to competing interpretations" (Venuti 2011:40). Venuti does not explicitly comment on what kind of ethical position a translation can stake out and what kind of ideological function it can serve. His position becomes clearer when he talks about considering whether a translation creates new values in the dominant receiving culture. So a translation originating from a non-dominant culture can serve to undermine what Thompson in his study of ideology refers to as "relations of domination." From this perspective, Luther's translation could be seen as a way to mobilise a following behind his interpretation in order to attack groups who occupied positions of power, in this case, the Roman Catholic Church (Thompson 1990:56).

The problem here is that the new values created by Luther's translation did not just affect the dominant culture of the Roman Catholic Church. It changed the cultural map of Northern European Christendom as well. And what we must consider here in ethical terms are the deep divisions that his words generated in Christian and, indeed, Hebraic communities for years after they were published. It could be argued that Luther's translation was flawed on the grounds that it showed a lack of *agape* for the original, that is, in not conforming to the future of the original, it singularly failed to build the body of Christ, and, on a secular reading, it failed to build Gouanvic's "destinies of communities." It is in that sense that Luther's translation can be said to be ethically problematic.

---

trained, confident young men and women. These professional translators and interpreters go about their work in a conflict-free environment and live happily ever after. They do not get thrown into Guantánamo or shot at in Iraq, and they do not end up on the border of Kosovo and Albania in the middle of a nasty war, where they would have to decide whether or not to fulfil their commission at the expense of treating potential victims with compassion and respect."

6. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to explore the moral dimension of translated communication from the perspective of ethics involving an appeal to the divine. The analysis points out how secular appeals to morality fall back on professional codes which fail to motivate the moral agent. It is also clear that the unconditional nature of the moral imperative is downplayed by such approaches that prefer to base their moral judgements on grounds that involved utilitarian calculations, law-driven codes of ethics, or vague relativism.

This article does not argue that people lacking faith in God do not act morally: they clearly do. But when they do so, the unconditional nature of their moral judgement, and the grace which motivates them to act morally, are not of this world. The argument is that, to present ethical judgements as if they are of this world reduces them and fundamentally distorts our moral vision. Some may still argue that religious ethics in the field of translation studies is of limited value for the training of translators who are non-believers. I must disagree. Secular ethics is based on some set of religious values even if it does not include the divine as part of the motivation for moral action. And religious ethics cannot call itself ethics if it is exclusive and restricts salvation to believers. It must enter into meaningful dialogue with people of faith and of no-faith alike, and it cannot by virtue of the fact that God inscribes himself in all human hearts (see Hebrews 8:10) be confined to the private sphere. I have explored this mutual call for meaningful dialogue in earlier writing (Wolf 2012), where I have argued that dialogue between the religious and the secular involves a re-conceptualising of secularism in its dealings with religions.

In summary, it is argued that, for the sake of openness and the success of intercultural/translated communication, even the most fervent non-believers must try to gain an understanding of the ethical implications arrived at by religious propositions, to discover a common ground in the bridging of two differing world views and, as I put it earlier, "to physically occupy the spaces of overlaps, e.g., visit places where human beings have worshipped and outpoured their grief and their joy to the Divine for thousands of years."[8]

This discussion of religious ethics for translators is predicated on the idea that to mediate between cultures is to be open to the possibility of seeing the Other as the image of God, as a being of this world and not of this world. It is to respond to the unconditional voice of one's inner conscience as the demand to love the Other and to be motivated to trusting in our translational deeds by divine grace.

[8] The secular refusal to occupy spaces of overlap is nowhere better illustrated than in the reluctance of a British university to hold its graduation ceremony in the local cathedral.

References

Angelelli, Claudia V. 2004. *Medical interpreting and cross-cultural communication*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Baker, Mona. 2008. Ethics of renarration. *Cultus* 1(1):10–33.

Baker, Mona. 2010. Interpreters and translators in the war zone. *The Translator* 16(2):197–222.

Barton, Stephen C. 2012. The epistles and Christian ethics. In Robin Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Christian ethics*, 54–66. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berman, Antoine. 1984. Traduction ethnocentrique et traduction hypertextuelle. *L'Écrit du temps* 7:109–123.

Boswell, John. 1980. *Christianity, social tolerance, and homosexuality: Gay people in Western Europe from the beginning of the Christian era to the fourteenth century*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Bot, Hanneke. 2005. *Dialogue interpreting in mental health*. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Brunner, Emil. 1947. *The divine imperative: A study in Christian ethics*. Translated by Olive Wyon. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

Bulut, Alev and Turgay Kurultay. 2001. Interpreters-in-aid at disasters: Community interpreting in the process of disaster management. *The Translator* 7(2):249–263.

Buncombe, Andrew, and Justin Huggler. 2004. A torture victim recalls the humiliation. *The Independent* 6 May 2004. Accessed 11 December 2014. www.countercurrents.org/iraq-justin060504.htm.

Carpenter, Edward F. 1961. *Common sense about Christian ethics*. London: Gollancz.

Chesterman, Andrew. 2001. Proposal for a Hieronymic oath. *The Translator* 7(2):139–154.

Clifford, Andrew. 2004. Is fidelity ethical? The social role of the healthcare interpreter. *Traduction, terminologie, rédaction* 17(2):89–114.

Derrida, Jacques. 1997. *Limited, Inc*. Translated by Samuel Weber and Jeffrey Mehlman. Evanston: Northwestern University Press.

Drugan, Jo. 2010. Ethics training for translators and interpreters. *MultiLingual* 38–40.

Fletcher, Joseph. 1966. *Situation ethics: The new morality*. London: SCM Press.

Fletcher, Joseph. 1967. *Moral responsibility: Situation ethics at work*. London: SCM Press.

Gouanvic, Jean-Marc. 2001. Ethos, ethics and translation. *The Translator* 7(2):203–212.

Hebblethwaite, Brian. 1982. *Christian ethics in the modern age*. Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox Press.

Koskinen, Kaisa. 2000. *Beyond ambivalence: Post-modernity and the ethics of translation*. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Tampere, Tampere, Finland.

Laygues, Arnaud. 2001. Death of a ghost: A case study of ethics in cross-generation relations between translators. *The Translator* 7(2):169–183.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 1982. *Éthique et infini. Dialogues avec Philippe Nemo*. Paris: Fayard & Radio-France.

Luther, Martin. 1984. *Die Bibel, nach der Übersetzung Martin Luthers.* Revised edition. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.

Metzger, Melanie. 1999. *Sign language interpreting: Deconstructing the myth of neutrality*. Washington: Georgetown University Press.

Niebuhr, Reinhold. 1936. *An interpretation of Christian ethics*. London: SCM Press.

Nord, Christiane. 2001. Loyalty revisited. *The Translator* 7(2):185–202.

Palmer, Jerry. 2007. Interpreting and translation for western media in Iraq. In Myriam Salama-Carr (ed.), *Translating and interpreting conflict*, 13–28. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Pym, Anthony. 2001. The return to ethics in translation studies. *The Translator* 7(2):129–138.

Simons, Helen, and Robin Usher. 2000. Introduction: Ethics in the practice of research. In Helen Simons and Robin Usher (eds.), *Situated ethics in educational research*, 1–11. London and New York: Routledge.

Stackhouse, Max L., and David W. Miller. 2012. Business, economics and Christian ethics. In Robin Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Christian ethics*, 239–256. Cambridge: CUP.

Venuti, Lawrence. 2011. Film adaptation and translation theory: Equivalence and ethics. *Translation* Inaugural Issue:37–40.

Vermeer, Hans-Josef. 1996. *A Skopos theory of translation (some arguments for and against).* Heidelberg: TEXT con TEXT.

Thompson, J.B. 1990. *Ideology and modern culture: Critical and social theory in the era of mass communication*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Tillich, Paul. 1963. *Morality and beyond*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Toury, Gideon. 1995. *Descriptive translation studies and beyond*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Wadensjö, Cecilia. 1998. *Interpreting as interaction*. London: Longman.

Ward, Keith. 1976. *The divine image*. London: SPCK.

Williams, Rowan. 2012. Making moral decisions. In Robin Gill (ed.), *The Cambridge companion to Christian ethics*, 3–15. Cambridge: CUP.

Wolf, Alan. 2012. Intercultural identity and interfaith dialogue: A holy place to be. *The Journal of Language and Intercultural Communication* 12(1):37–56.