

# **Agency in (re)translating the Bible:**

the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’ of (re)creating the  
‘untouchable’ sacred texts

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# Starting points:

## 1.1. (Re)translation

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NOT

\*A work pursued by translators, within the process of translating a text

\*A revision of a translated text (ex. to update the register)

BUT

\*A re-writing of (already translated) biblical excerpts

\*By particular authors, within the process of their own creative writings

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## 1.2. Biblical translation – “creative” approaches

### ▶ **Authenticated versions vs. re-appropriation:**

- ▶ **Indication of sources – excerpts quoted differently**



- ▶ I. Literary work: Colleen Carroll Campbell’s *My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir* (New York, Image, 2012);

#### Literary author

- *The New Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition* (1989)
- *The New American Bible* (1970)

# Colleen Carroll Campbell's statement

- ▶ “I believe most of the biblical citations were from either the New Revised Standard Version (Catholic Edition) or the New American Bible [used by the U.S. bishops as the Catholic lectionary here in the U.S. (...)]. **In some cases, I used *another version* if that translation had the Bible verse rendered in the precise words I remembered or preferred ... (Often, I craft a sentence around some particular words in the Bible verse, so if another word were used in its place, it wouldn't have the same power.)”**

(July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

## 1.3. Biblical translation – “creative” approaches

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- ▶ 2. Papal document: Pope Paul VI’s speech delivered before the United Nations General Assembly (October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1965).

- ▶ **Indication of sources**  **excerpts quoted differently**

### Literary author

- *The New Revised Standard Version – Catholic Edition (1989)*
- *The New American Bible (1970)*

### Institutional author

- *The Douay-Rheims Bible (1610/1750)*
- *The New American Bible (from 1948 on & encouraged by the Vatican)*

# First inference

- ▶ It is **possible** to change officially published, authenticated versions of the Bible



## ▶ **AGENCY**

**(“willingness and ability to act”)**

(Tuija Kinnunen & Kaisa Koskinen. *Translators Agency*. Tampere University Press, 2010, p. 6)



- How?
- Why?
- Which effects?

# Research questions

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- ▶ (i) **How** did the authors re-appropriate excerpts from the Catholic Bible: what changes have they done when compared to the sources they indicated?
- ▶ (ii) **Why** did they pursue such re-appropriation: to facilitate the understanding of the biblical messages themselves by integrating them in a fluent, clear discourse, OR to sustain their own specific messages with textual, ideological references?
- ▶ (iii) Would the authors promote a **different interpretation of the messages** had they abided by “official”, authenticated versions of the Bible instead?



# A. The literary author: Colleen Carroll Campbell

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## **Background**

- ▶ Strong Catholic family environment
- ▶ College: disregard of religious practices
- ▶ Feeling “lost”: intense quest to regain her faith
  
- ▶ Mentors: six Catholic saints, in whose life experiences the author could find the help/ lesson she needed



## Excerpt nr. 1 (Matthew 19:14)

“Thérèse’s **‘little way of spiritual childhood’**, as it came to be known, grew out of Jesus’s command in the Gospel of Matthew: **‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these’** (Matt. 19:14). Such scripture passages convinced Thérèse that what Jesus most wants from his followers is not great deeds but great love, an interior attitude of total, **childlike confidence in God.**”

### **A. The passage in the book (ch. 2, p. 35):**

-**Mentor**: **Thérèse de Lisieux** (Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus);

-**Affinity**: Thérèse’s father, Louis Martin, also suffered from **dementia** & the same feeling of both **powerlessness** and **distance**;

-**Lesson**: to pay attention to the **“little ones”** & to regain her (lost) **“childlike” confidence in God.**

### **B. The excerpt in the Bible:**

-**The passage**: an episode of Christ’s life in which He **extols children** (to whom the Kingdom of God belongs – dif. adults: “mundane bias”);

-**Children’s preciousness**: emotional **purity**, **natural** sense of belonging, **unmitigated** trust and spontaneous, **honest** self-commitment (spiritual values) – the **“childlike” confidence in God.**

# Textual analysis:

## 1. The “hows”

*My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir (2012)*

‘Let the **little** children come to me, and do not **hinder** them, for the **kingdom of heaven** belongs to such as these.’

*The New Revised Standard Version (1989) (“modern” Catholic English Edition)*

‘Let the **little** children come to me, and do not **stop** them; for it is **to such as these** that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’

*The New American Bible (1970) (“official” version in the U.S.)*

‘Let the children come to me, and do not **prevent** them; for the **kingdom of heaven** belongs to such as these.’

### Emphasis

- “**little**”: reinforces the idea of **littleness**, in two ways:
- the more “little”, the more **precious**;
- The author’s/ Thérèse’s sense of **helplessness** – to be of “little” help;
- “**kingdom of heaven**”: focus on what it should be a Christian’s main (final) goal.



### Register

“**to prevent**” & “**to stop**”: pragmatic verbs (physical action) - a more **colloquial** tone (esp. 2<sup>nd</sup>);

“**to hinder**”: more **poetic** (emotions) - a more **formal** tone (Bible’s “traditional” register/ “mystical aura”).



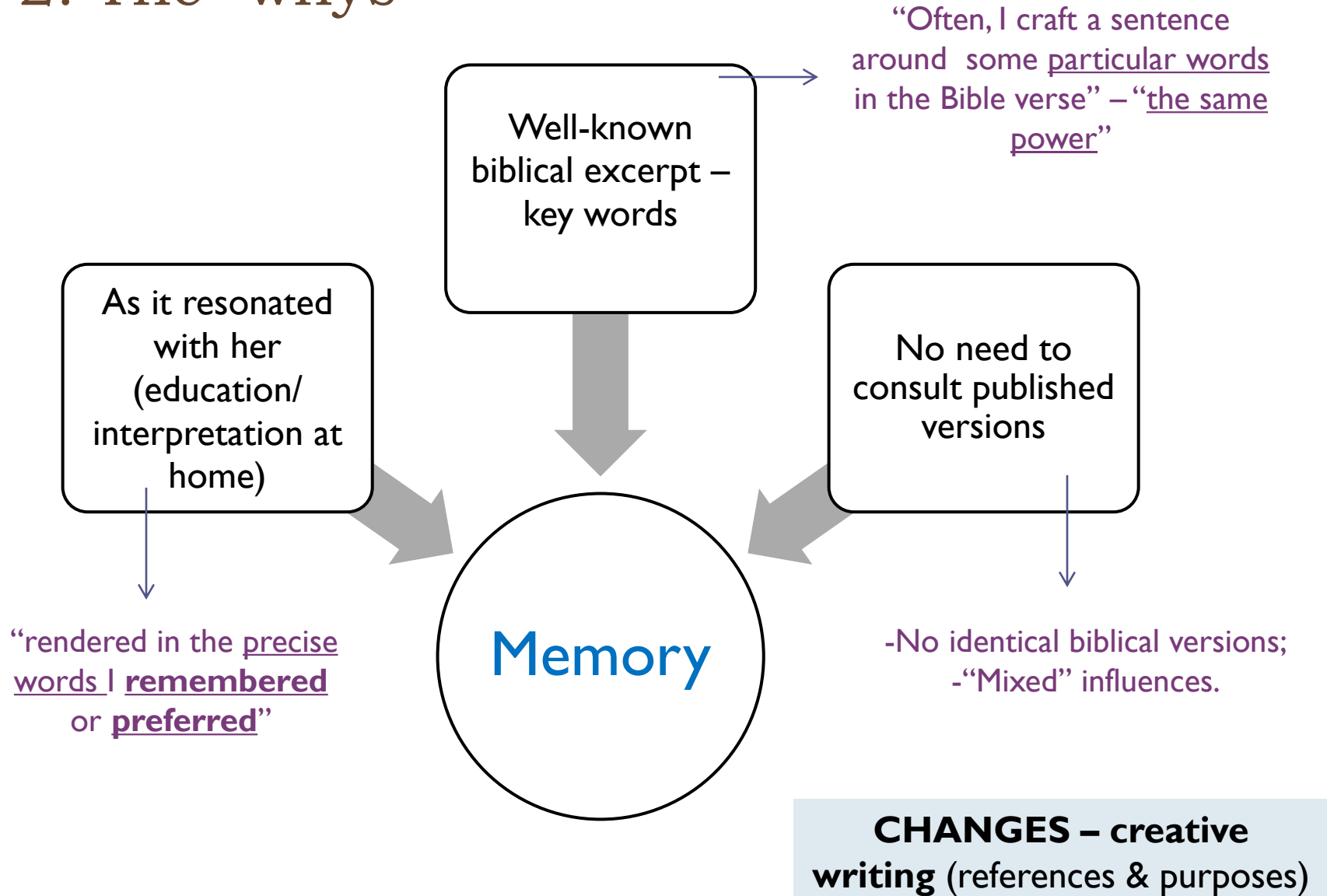
### Meaning

“**to prevent**” & “**to stop**”: **literal, explicit meaning** of the biblical excerpt: **avoiding** (1<sup>st</sup>)/ **intercepting** (2<sup>nd</sup>) children from **physically** going to Jesus’ encounter;

“**to hinder**”: Suggests an **implied meaning**, mainly **emotional**: to make children feel **inhibited** or **discouraged** to follow Jesus’ path (“hide” their “childlikeness”).

# Textual analysis:

## 2. The “whys”



# Textual analysis:

## 3. Effects on reading – the NRSVCE instead

*My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir (2012)*

“Thérèse’s ‘little way of spiritual childhood,’ as it came to be known, grew out of Jesus’s command in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Let the **little children** come to me, and do not **hinder** them, for the **kingdom of heaven** belongs to such as these.’”

*The New Revised Standard Version (1989) (“modern” Catholic English Edition)*

“Thérèse’s ‘little way of spiritual childhood,’ as it came to be known, grew out of Jesus’s command in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Let the **little children** come to me, and do not **stop** them; for it is **to such as these** that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’”

The SAME reinforcement: “**littleness**” – very important to the understanding of the message



NOT be suggested an **implied meaning** – “to stop”: literal, reading of the biblical excerpt



QUESTION: **reliability** of the Words – a much more colloquial version



NOT be **recalled** the important Christian aim: “kingdom of heaven”

### 3. Effects on reading – the NAB instead

*My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir (2012)*

“Thérèse’s ‘little way of spiritual childhood,’ as it came to be known, grew out of Jesus’s command in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Let the **little** children come to me, and do not **hinder** them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

*The New American Bible (1970)*  
(“official” version in the U.S.)

“Thérèse’s ‘little way of spiritual childhood,’ as it came to be known, grew out of Jesus’s command in the Gospel of Matthew: ‘Let the **children** come to me, and do not **prevent** them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.’”

**NOT** infer the importance of “**littleness**” – loss of textual coherence



**A LITERAL** reading as well – “to prevent”: less colloquial, still also pragmatic (just due to the “mystical aura”)



**Misunderstanding** of children’s preciousness: physical/emotional fragility (weakness), **NOT** spiritual “enlightenment” (strength)



**KEEP** important features: register & last focus.

# Excerpt nr. 2 (Matthew 6: 26-27, 31-33)

## A. The passage in the book (ch. 2, p. 50):

- Continues the previous.

## B. The excerpt in the Bible:

- Perspective of God as the Holy Father – close to human's reality: guardianship and caretaking of children, under any condition;

- Enhancement of God as the Almighty: the only who can influence Man's destiny;

- Jesus' teaching: total confidence in God.

By January 2001, the five-year anniversary of his Alzheimer's diagnosis, Dad's childlike confidence in God had become a kind of touchstone for me. I had come to recognize his view of reality as more lucid than my own. I might remember what day it was or where I had put my wallet, but when it came to what really mattered, I was less enlightened than Dad. On most days, I still operated under the illusion that I was in control, that everything depended on my cleverness, my diligence, my merits. Dad knew better. He lived the truth of Jesus's words in the Gospel of Matthew:

Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? . . . Therefore do not be anxious, saying, "What shall we eat?" or "What shall we drink?" or "What shall we wear?" For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.

*Matt. 6:26-27, 31-33*

# Textual analysis:

## 1. The “hows” & 2. The “whys”

*My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir (2012)*

“Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, **and** yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

*The New Revised Standard Version (1989) (Standard Catholic English Edition)*

“Look at the birds of the air: They neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?”

*The New American Bible (1970) (“official” version in the US)*

“Look at the birds in the sky; **they do not sow or reap, they gather nothing into barns**, yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you **more important** than they?”

- Change of meaning:  
“of the air”

- “in the sky”: literal, pragmatic sense of looking directly to the sky and see the birds/ “of the air”: implied sense of taking birds (who live on the air) as references – of **freedom** (spiritual);
- **Parallel**: “childlike” confidence (St. Thérèse & Gospel) + the author’s need to learn not to concern about life;

- Clarification: “They neither sow **nor** reap **nor** gather into barns (...)”

- Easier reading & understanding: promotes the contrast **freedom/ care**;

- Change of perspective & implied meanings:  
“of more value”

- “**Important**”: related to influence and power/ “**value**”: associated with **usefulness**;
- **Re-directionality**: Jesus directly speaking to her: (1<sup>st</sup>) she was more **useful** to her father than anyone else & (2<sup>nd</sup>) more **valuable** than those who made her feel inhibited of being “little” (= the birds in the sky: “freed” from religious ideologies)

*My Sisters the Saints: a Spiritual Memoir (2012)*

“And **which of you** by **being anxious** can add a single **hour** to **his span** of life? ... Therefore do not be **anxious**, saying, 'What **shall** we eat?' or 'What **shall** we drink?' or 'What **shall** we wear?’”

*The New Revised Standard Version (1989) (Standard Catholic English Edition)*

“And **can any of you** by **worrying** add a single **hour** to **your span** of life? ... Therefore do not **worry**, saying, ‘What **will** we eat?’ or ‘What **will** we drink?’ or ‘What **will** we wear?’”

*The New American Bible (1970) (“official” version in the US)*

“**Can any of you** by **worrying** add a single **moment** to **your life-span**? ... So do not **worry** and say, ‘What **are we** to eat?’ or ‘What **are we** to drink?’ or ‘What **are we** to wear?’”

- Personal perspective:  
“which of you” & “anxious”

- Implied meanings: “hour” + “his” + “span” & “shall”

- Re-directionality: Jesus giving the author a personal advice

- **Anxious**: a more intense human condition (vs. “worried”: essentially, a mental state)/ **which of you**: family members;  
**Directly related to the author**: “I was feeling **antsy** about settling in for another slow-paced, repetitive conversation with my demented father”, “Dad’s lost memories and abilities still **pained me**”, “I **feared** what the coming years would bring”
- **Hour**: more precise & idea of lasting too long (“Other days, I dawdled in my apartment for **hours** before finally rousing myself to visit Dad” – p. 49);
- **Span**: focus on speed (especially noticeable in dementia);
- **His**: her father (clear re-directionality);
- “**What shall we (eat/ drink/ wear)**”: capacities that her father was loosing (could eventually be entirely lost);
- **No reason to be anxious**: she could not avoid the Alzheimer’s degenerative character;
- **To take advantage of all the time possible** to be with him (double benefit).

# Textual analysis:

## 3. Effects on reading: the other versions instead

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### NRSVCE

- **Facilitate reading:** a more fluent & colloquial discourse

### NAB

- **A more narrowed, “rational”** reading (no implicit messages)

### COMPROMISE

- The **metaphorical interpretation** promoted in the author’s version;
- The **interest of the literary work/** the **author’s goal:** the identification from readers towards the author’s personal story.



# B. The institutional author: the Vatican

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## Background

- ▶ International context (1965):
- ▶ Positive side:
  - ▶ Modernization of newly-independent countries – new industrialized techniques: economic growth;
  - ▶ Improvements on public health – demographic growth;
- ▶ Negative side:
  - ▶ Tensions between two major economical-political ideologies: Capitalism vs. Communism – fierce competition: nuclear armament, espionage and space venture;
  - ▶ Asian and African decolonization (post-Second World War) – severe rebellions (civilians against foreigners);
  - ▶ Other rebellions: against dictatorships, civil inequalities, wars (ex. the U.S. in Vietnam);
  - ▶ Lack of knowledge & exploitation of “Third World” countries.



# Excerpt nr. 1 (Mark 16, 15)

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We have been on our way for a long time and we bring a long history with us. Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage in search of an opportunity to speak heart to heart with the whole world. It began on the day when we were commanded: «Go, bring the good news to all nations.» You are the ones who represent all nations.

## A. The passage in the speech (p. 2, par. 8):

- Supporting the historical role of the Church: to **evangelize**/ to spread the Gospel;
- Evidencing the importance of such official papal visit to the U.N. (the very first);
- Pragmatic purpose: **new political measures** (put into practice);
- Main goal: to promote **world peace**.

## B. The excerpt in the Bible:

- The passage: a command from Jesus to His followers:
- \***To urge them**: to transmit the Divine Word to the largest amount of people as possible (evidence of the Apostles' **missionary role** & promotion of **world peace** – generalized message of love).



# Textual analysis:

## 1. The “hows”

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*Pope Paul VI's speech at  
the UN – official  
English version (1965)*

“Go, bring the good  
news to all nations”

*The Douay-Rheims  
Bible  
(1610/ 1750)*

“Go ye into the whole  
world, and preach the  
gospel to every  
creature.”

*The New American  
Bible (from 1948 on –  
1970)*

“Go into the whole  
world and proclaim the  
gospel to every  
creature”

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# Textual analysis:

## 2. The “whys”

“Go,”

- Change of the focus: the **urgency** of the command (action & promptness);

“[to] bring”

- Change of the emphasis: the **action** (not the place – “into the whole world”);
- Change of the meaning: the focus is in the **receiver** (to whom the message is brought to) & implies something **good** (as a gift);

“the good news”

Implied meaning: “**good**” = for the benefit of all human beings (a gift)/ “**news**” = Jesus’ message was unknown/ lacking (a solution for Mankind’s problems);

“to all nations”

- “**all**” – more inclusive: every nations, equally considered (as “brothers”);
- “**nations**” – a politically-charged word: considering newly-independent States + immediate receivers: United **Nations** representatives + the Vatican State.

# Textual analysis:

## 3. Effects on reading/ interpretation

### **B. The Douay-Rheims version:**

“We have been on our way for a long time and we bring a long history with us. Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage in search of an opportunity to speak heart to heart with the whole world. It began on the day when we were commanded: ‘Go ye into the whole world, and preach the gospel to every creature’ You are the ones who represent all nations.”

### **C. The New American Bible version:**

“We have been on our way for a long time and we bring a long history with us. Here we are celebrating the epilogue to a laborious pilgrimage in search of an opportunity to speak heart to heart with the whole world. It began on the day when we were commanded: ‘Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature.’ You are the ones who represent all nations.”

NOT an emphasis on UN members’ responsibility: taking “good news” (peace measures) wherever needed



NOT the idea of urgency: just of something to be done (eventually)



NOT an emphasis on acting on behalf of the entire international community: brotherhood = world peace

## Excerpt nr. 2 (Isaiah 2:4)

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But it is not enough to feed the hungry. Each man must also be assured a life in keeping with his dignity, and that is what you are striving to do. Is this not the fulfillment before our eyes, and thanks to you, of the prophet's words that apply so well to your Institution: "They shall beat their swords into pruning-hooks" (Is. 2:4)? Are you not employing the prodigious forces of the earth and the magnificent inventions of science no longer as instruments of death, but as instruments of life for the new era of mankind?

### A. The passage in the speech (p. 6, par. 27):

#### Man's dignity:

- Economic & social progress:
- Enough resources to feed national populations;
- Education;
- Culture;
- Moral re-consciousness:
- Spiritual-based living/ faith = **peace.**

### B. The excerpt in the Bible:

-The prophet: for the masses, his words (faith) would lead them towards salvation;

-The passage:

\***God as judge**: of the Gentiles (=acting against His will/non-believers);

\***His decision**: against **war/ conflict**;

\***Focus**: all peoples should follow the Church of Christ (to come) – **a peaceful mankind.**

# Textual analysis:

## 1. The “hows”

<i>Pope Paul VI's speech at the UN – official English version (1965)</i>	<i>The Douay-Rheims Bible (1610/ 1750)</i>	<i>The New American Bible (1970)</i>
“They shall <u>beat</u> their <b>swords</b> into <b>pruning-hooks</b> ”	“and they shall <u>turn</u> their <b>swords</b> into <b>ploughshares</b> , and their <b>spears</b> into <b>sickles</b> ”	“They shall <u>beat</u> their <b>swords</b> into <b>plowshares</b> and their <b>spears</b> into <b>pruning hooks</b> ”

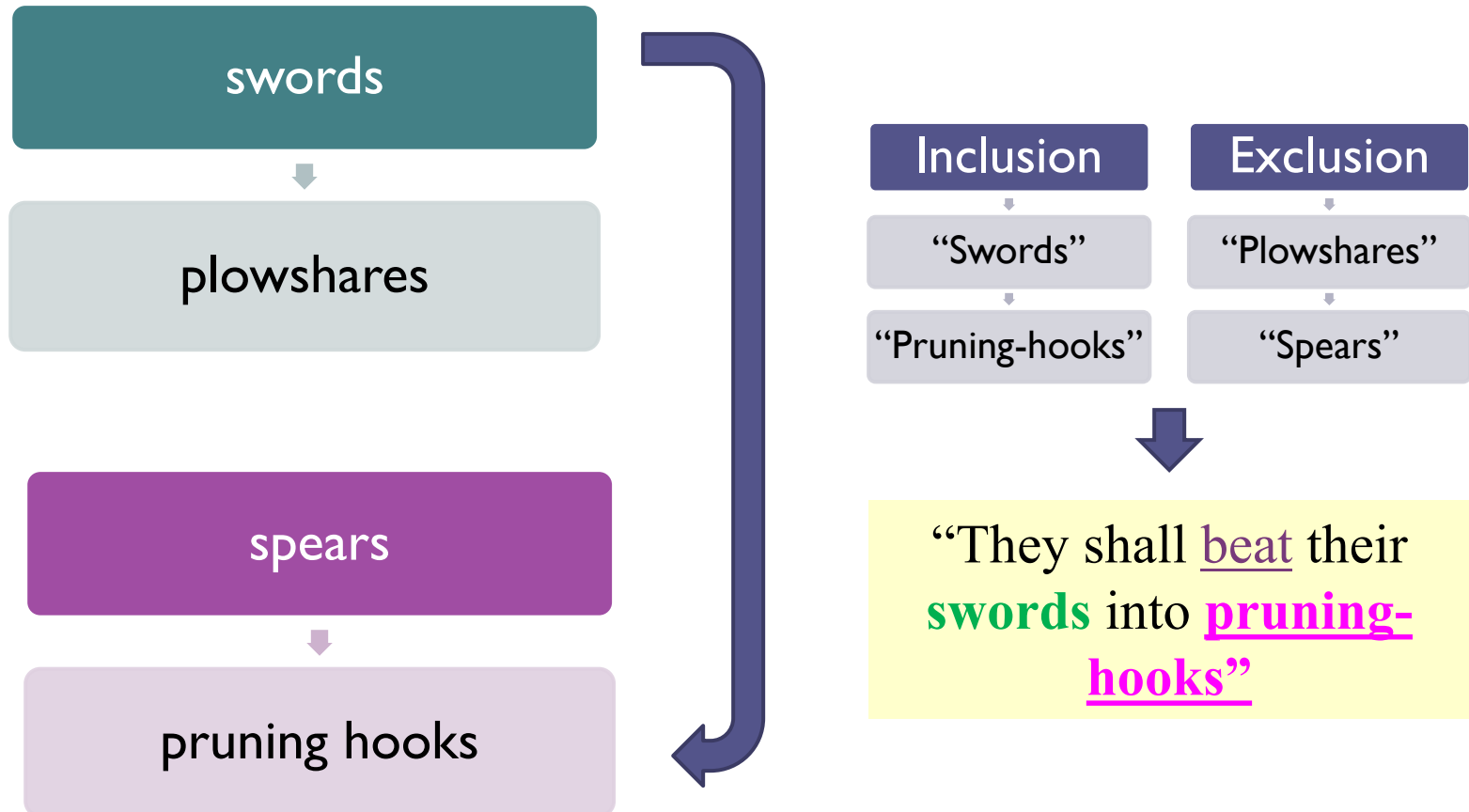
- **Synonyms – differences:** register and/or socio-cultural contexts (UK/ US)

“to beat (or turn) **swords** into **plowshares**” = “to change to a peaceful way of life and spend money on peaceful things rather than weapons”

([dictionary.cambridge.org](http://dictionary.cambridge.org))

“to beat (or turn) **spears** into **pruning hooks**” = “sharp, penetrating thoughts of cruelty turned into helpful ways.” ([www.truthunity.net](http://www.truthunity.net))

“They shall beat their **swords** into plowshares  
and their spears into pruning hooks”

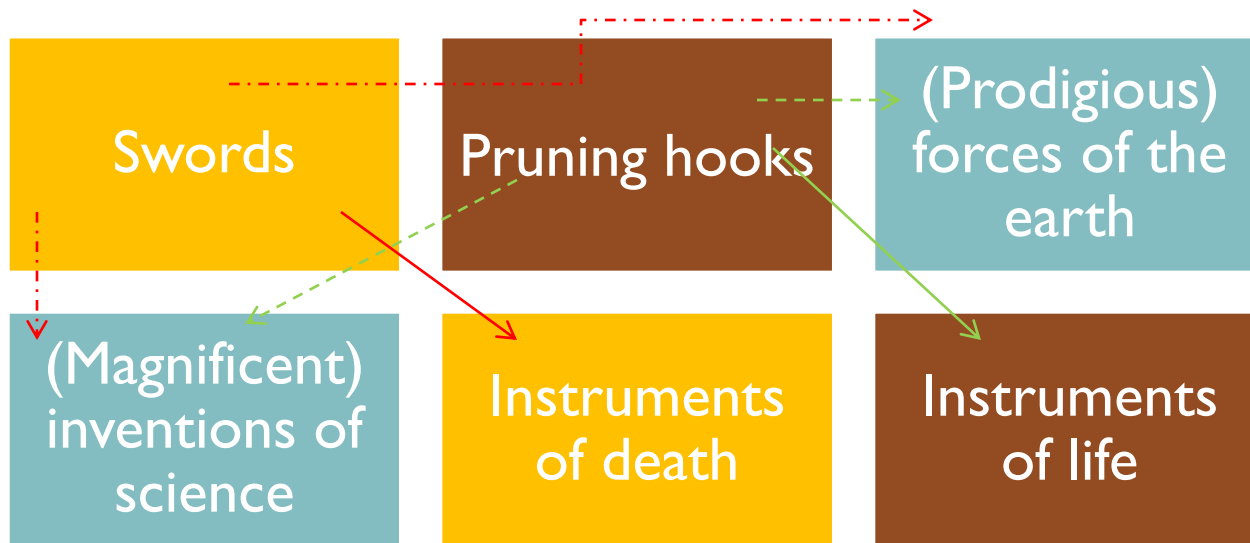


“os quais transformarão as suas **espadas** em relhas de **arados**, e as suas **lanças**, em **foices**”  
(*Bíblia Sagrada*, Difusora Bíblica, 1965)

# Textual analysis:

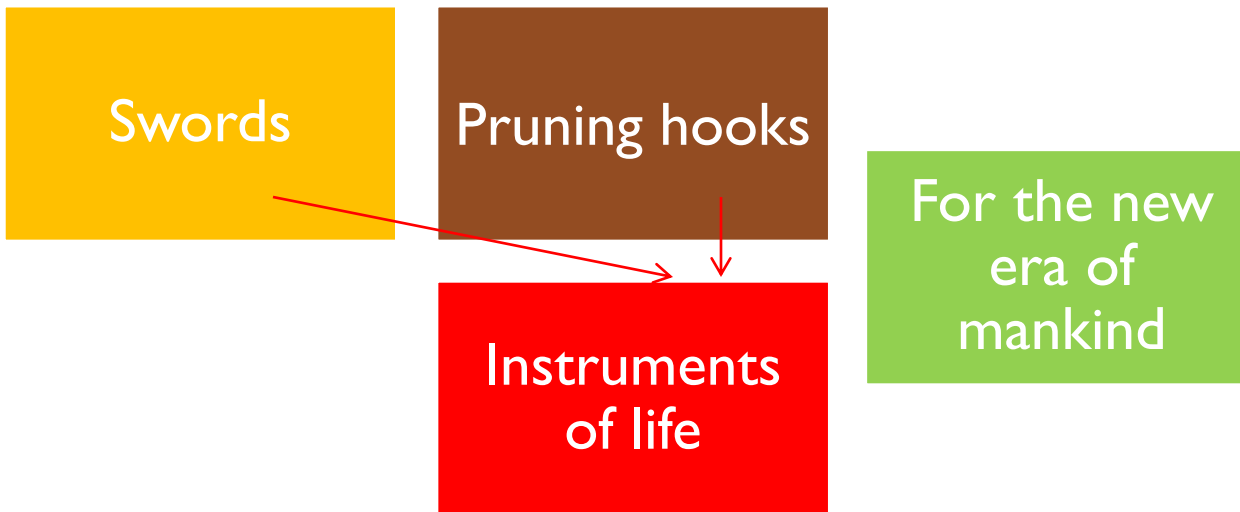
## 2. The “whys”

But it is not enough to feed the hungry. Each man must also be assured a life in keeping with his dignity, and that is what you are striving to do. Is this not the fulfillment before our eyes, and thanks to you, of the prophet's words that apply so well to your Institution: "They shall beat their swords into pruning-hooks" (Is. 2:4)? Are you not employing the prodigious forces of the earth and the magnificent inventions of science no longer as instruments of death, but as instruments of life for the new era of mankind?



# Metonymy: the part for the whole

- **1. Swords:**
- Instruments of death;
- Forces of the Earth & inventions of Science WHEN used for self-enhancement, harm (ex. nuclear energy);
- **2. Pruning hooks:**
- Instruments of life;
- “Prodigious” forces of the Earth & “magnificent” inventions of Science WHEN used for human, social progress (for the good).



## Metaphor: implicit meanings

- **“Swords”**: from a negative meaning (a **weapon used to hurt**) to a positive one (to **guard/ protect** – religious symbolism);
- **“Pruning hooks”**: from the literal meaning (agriculture) to the idea of **getting rid of something undesirable** (WAR, INEQUALITIES, REBELLIONS, HUNGER) in an effective way (WORLD PEACE);
- **“For the new era of mankind”**: direct appeal to the UN members: to **grab** their political weapons (= **swords**) and use them in the benefit of the whole international community (= as **pruning hooks**).

*The biblical excerpt – Pope Paul VI's posture before the UN*

Isaiah



Messenger of God

God



Mankind's "spiritual" judge

Pope Paul VI



Messenger of the Catholic Church

"This is the kind of **messenger** who, at the end of a long journey, is handing over the letter that has been entrusted to him"

The UN



Mankind's "temporal" judge

"We are tempted to say that in a way this characteristic of yours reflects in the **temporal order** what our Catholic Church intends to be in the **spiritual order**: one and universal (...) Who can fail to see the need and importance of thus gradually coming to the establishment of a **world authority** capable of taking effective action on the **juridical and political** planes?."

# Textual analysis:

## 3. Effects on reading/ interpretation

### The Douay-Rheims (or the New American Bible version):

“But it is not enough to feed the hungry. Each man must also be assured a life in keeping with his dignity, and that is what you are striving to do. Is this not the fulfillment before our eyes, and thanks to you, of the prophet's words that apply so well to your Institution: ‘They shall beat their **swords** into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks’ (Is. 2:4)? Are you not employing the prodigious forces of the earth and the magnificent inventions of science no longer as instruments of death, but as instruments of life for the new era of mankind?”

Immediate reaction:  
a well-known idiom  
(religion-common  
lexicon) – reading:  
common sense



NOT inferable the  
re-contextualization  
of the speech: it  
would compromise  
the receiver's  
responsibility



NOT inferable the  
metaphorical  
meaning: it would  
compromise the  
intended urgency

# Results: the authors' agency

## Colleen Carroll Campbell

### 1. How:

\*Changing the perspective (modulation): writing for herself;

Re-directionality: the biblical speaker talking directly to her.

### 2. Why:

\*To sustain/ illustrate the narrative: reliability & readers' acknowledgement, identification and interest.

### 3. Effects:

\*Benefit of her own work/ world views.

## The Vatican

### • 1. How:

\*Negative-positive (modulation);

- \*Re-contextualization: from biblical contexts to 1965;

### • 2. Why:

\*To appeal more directly/ urge the immediate receivers;

\*To clarify the messages & the Pope's role in the international context – also a political figure;

### • 3. Effects:

\*Benefit of the Pope's political/ ideological purposes.

Final remark:

## The exercise of agency in (re)translation

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- **NOT** to facilitate the understanding of the biblical excerpts;
  - **NO** substantial gains had authenticated versions been “faithfully” respected;
  - **COMPROMISE** the reception (understanding) of the intended messages;
  - **AGENCY**: extremely relevant in creative writings in general – **EVEN** using the Bible as “source”: **NO** “untouchable” texts.
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