A Critical Evaluation of the Contextualisation of Alpha France

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Introduction

Alpha France seems to present a great paradox in terms of a culturally transferable piece of Bible Engagement. Being a high profile programme of evangelism supported by all the major denominations, there are now, according to the Alpha website (2012), over 55,000 Alpha courses worldwide in over 166 countries. Yet alongside its success, Alpha has received a number of compelling criticisms including accusations of its resistance to "local adaptation in favour of the need for consistency" (Ireland, 2005, p20). In view of this, an identification of three specific distinctives of French culture will provide a framework to an examination of themes and language within the texts and talks that require particular sensitivity in translation. A fusion of Bible and Mission scholarship with an analysis of the way these themes are communicated will enable a critical evaluation of Alpha France as a tool of mission.

Alpha originated at the London Anglican church, Holy Trinity Brompton. It was developed by Nicky Gumbel and was first published in 1993. The course consists of 10 weekly talks which take place in the setting of a meal and many guests come in response to invitations from a friend. The opportunity is given for discussion around tables following the talk. Although an invitation is offered during the course for people to commit their lives to Jesus, and a day or weekend away is dedicated to the opportunity to experience as well as learn about the Holy Spirit, a major feature of the course is its intention to allow people to explore the Christian faith without feeling pressured to have to do so.

Alpha's Translation into France

It was the ‘stimulating’ and ‘welcoming’ atmosphere (de Leyritz, 2007, p57), that first impressed the French couple Marc and Florence de Leyritz, who first discovered Alpha in London in 1997. Following this, de Leyritz, (now president of Alpha France), encountered an enthusiastic response to his first Alpha course in a francophone Catholic parish in London. Subsequently, during 1999, a meeting of Catholic bishops was organised, ‘le Conseil Permanent de la Conférence des Evêques de France’ (de Leyritz, 2007, pp68-93), initiating trial Alpha courses and creating a board, in accordance with the authors of Alpha, to rework aspects of language from which objections had arisen.

In January 2001 the final text was agreed. Over the following 7 years after Alpha France was launched in France the numbers of churches running the course increased from 30 to 480, and the number of people attending from around 1000 to well over 53,000. According to the Christian Community Foundation of France (CCFOF, 2012) it achieved in this time ‘the type of impact that successful Christian movements have had in 20 years’. This is measured in terms of the number of people reached by the Gospel, number of Christians trained, and positive coverage in Christian media.

Criticism of Inflexibility

Like conversion, translation rests on ‘the principle of revision’ and is ‘not a single aoristic act, but a process’ (Walls, 1996, pp29, 28). However, in contradiction with this principle, Alpha is
accused of remaining rigid to its original, narrow contextualisation towards prosperous young professionals, expressed in Ireland’s complaint (2005, p5) against the ‘lack of freedom to adapt the course to fit either the spirituality of the church or the needs of a particular group’. This is a reasonable objection in light of his correct observation regarding HTB’s insistence of tight adherence to the Alpha copyright, which Ireland protests amounts to the creation of an Alpha ‘brand’ (Ireland, 2005, p5). This view mirrors an extensively reported criticism voiced by Pete Ward (an adviser to the Archbishop of Canterbury) who criticised HTB’s ‘pattern of control’ (Garner, 1999). Borrowing a phrase from the American social historian George Ritzer, who wrote about the ‘McDonaldization’ of society, Ward protests that Alpha is responsible for the ‘McDonaldization of religion’ (Garner, 1999).

Choosing, nevertheless, to cite McDonalds in his response, Ireland highlights Gumbel’s advocacy for the need for uniformity in Alpha wherever it is offered, insisting that, ‘if I went to McDonalds in Moscow and was given a ham sandwich, I would say that is not on’ (Ireland, 2005, p20). This underlines particular irony in the context of Alpha France, in view of the generally recognised French disapproval of McDonald’s, demonstrated in the overwhelming public support for the actions of the sheep farmer José Bové, who in August 1999 dismantled a McDonald’s restaurant in protest against globalization. The reaction is emphasised by Gordon (2001, p22), citing the article in newspaper Le Monde (1999), ‘McDonald’s commercial hegemony threatens our agriculture and its cultural hegemony insidiously ruins alimentary behaviour - both sacred reflections of the French identity’ (Gordon, 2001, p30).

Such a refusal to be tailored, however, echoes the previous paradigm of stereotypically structured church refuted in John Drane’s acclaimed book ‘McDonaldization of the Church’ (2000). This contradicts the essential principle of interculturation, which, for Bosch (1991, p453) requires that Christians ‘no longer participate as the ones who have all the answers but are learners like everybody else’. For this reason it must be justified whether Alpha France is locked into the old paradigm, demonstrating an inability to contextualise as a piece of Bible Engagement in translation. Such an evaluation may be discerned in light of the identification of the ‘distinctives’ of French culture, which, according to Walls (1996, p29), form the focus to which, ‘the word about Christ is applied’. This is underlined by the fact that translation is not just a question of language, but rather ‘of all that languages signify and embody; that fullness of specific human experience which we describe with the term “culture”’ (Guder, 2000, p82).

**French Culture**

1. **A La Table!**

‘Of all the components of French cultural identity, food may be one of the most universally recognized internationally’ (Gordon, 2001, p30). Being significant not only to France’s pride in famous cuisine, the context of a meal also contributes to what Hassenforder (2001, p12) describes as ‘Alpha culture’, incorporating la convivialité, friendship, friendliness and respect, which enable the opportunity to discuss and debate. In direct opposition to the description of a fast-food-style franchise, de Leyritz’s (2007, p57) describes Alpha as providing an open and inviting atmosphere that is adaptable to the needs of each person (‘un référential commun, adaptable à l’environnement commun de chacun’). The importance of this informal environment of a meal (culturally contextualised with the essential addition of red wine!) is also recognised by Hassenforder (2003), affirming the way it corresponds to ‘l’esprit du temps’. Moreover, the successful translation of this Alpha culture is evidenced in recent research published in the mainstream newspaper le Parisien (2011). According to this article, the majority of French people (58%) either believe in God or wonder about his existence and an astonishing 62% express a desire for an opportunity to discuss their thoughts in an ‘environment of trust’ (Juillet, 2011, p2).
ii) Lack of Biblical Tradition

According to Bjork, (1997, p33) one of the most significant distinctives of French culture impacting Bible Engagement is identified in ‘the absence of a strong biblical tradition’, which he argues contributes to a society of ‘utter secularity’ (Bjork, 1997, p32). This is demonstrated in the controversial legal bill passed by President Jacques Chirac in March, 2004, banning the wearing of visible religious symbols in all primary and secondary schools.

Since the early 1900’s, religious education in Secondary schools has been replaced by a civic, legal and social education ‘ECJS’, (education civique, juridique et sociale). Faith is, likewise, excluded from the primary curriculum. An explanation of the Christmas story does not feature any mention of Jesus, but only ‘le Papa Noel’, sometimes referred to in popular Christmas songs as ‘le Très-Haut’, meaning literally, ‘the Most-High’. A translation of the gospel message must therefore be sensitive to avoid a mistaken overemphasis upon Bible knowledge and a Biblical world view.

iii) Catholicism

Explaining the emergence of such a gulf between popular culture and the Bible, Bjork describes the relationship today between France and its Catholic heritage, clarifying that French people who commonly use the term ‘Catholic’ or ‘Christian’ to identify themselves are usually not referring to their worldview. However, the paradox exists in the tension resulting from the fact that although ‘the average Frenchman does not practice his Catholic faith, it is an integral part of his identity and social convention’ (Bjork, 1986, p36). Although it is important to note the author does not misinterpret this generalisation to ignore the complexities of subcultures and other faiths in France, being almost two thirds of the population, marks the significance of this Catholic ‘subsocietal group’ (Bjork, 1986, p36) as a cultural ‘distinctive’.

Alpha is run by thousands of Catholic parishes in more than 65 countries around the world, who, according to the UK Alpha website, (2012) consider it to present the ‘kerygma’, which ‘all the major denominations agree about’ and is entirely compatible with Catholic teaching when used as part of ‘an overall parish programme of evangelisation or catechesis.’

In spite of this, two principle objections have been expressed from an opposing Catholic perspective, projected forcefully in Cork’s refutation (2012) of Alpha’s claim to represent the core of Christianity, insisting that it represents instead a narrow Charismatic Protestant theological agenda. This is convincingly evidenced in Cork’s following comparison of space given to various subjects: ‘Contrasting the one small paragraph on Baptism, and the two pages on “Holy Communion”, with the eight pages on “speaking in tongues” and sixteen pages on “healing”, we get a truer sense of what Alpha is about’ (Cork, 2012).

Criticism regarding disproportionate emphasis on Charismatic theology is especially poignant in a French context in light of the fact that, according to the CCFF website (2012), an enormous ‘35,000 out of the 36,551 cites/towns/villages in France are without an Evangelical church’. For this reason, being such a minority (0.5% - 0.8% of the population), ‘French Evangelicals are often viewed as being part of a cult’ (CCFF, 2012). Cork also protests that, even with a Catholic supplement ‘tacked on’, it represents an individualistic gospel, reduced to ‘me and Jesus’ and therefore ‘cannot be recommended for Catholic use’ (Cork, 2012). Such criticism will be a key feature in the following evaluation of French Alpha, being in a country where ‘the majority of these people still consider the Catholic Church to be The Christian Church!’ (Bjork, 1997, p36)

Walls (1996, p8) correctly highlights that becoming ‘a new creation’ does not take place in a vacuum and it is impossible to ‘separate an individual from his social relationships and thus from his society’ (1996, p7). This principle, which he calls the ‘indigenizing principle’ was
demonstrated in Acts 15, when the decision of the Jerusalem Council to allow Gentile converts ‘a place to feel at home’ (Walls, 1996, p8). In the context of this principle, it is tragic to note the observation of missionary Kent Good which, he grieves, is all too common: ‘When you become a Christian in France, you have to abandon part of what it means to be French. Being Catholic is as much a part of being French as being born in the country. So you have to give up a lot’ (Bjork, 1997, p12).

iv) Philosophy

Philosophy features increasingly in the core of the French secondary teaching. In a recent radio broadcast on Radio France International (RFI), (2010) entitled ‘French 15-year-olds will soon be discussing Descartes and Socrates’ the current Education minister, Luc Chatel is cited, speaking at the UN cultural arm Unesco during its World Philosophy Day in Paris. Chatel advocated his decision to introduce more philosophy in Lycées, stating that ‘in this time of globalisation which is worrisome, and sometimes causes people to turn inwards; without a doubt, the world needs philosophy’ (RFI, 2010). This demonstrates an intentional lean towards human reason that further exacerbates in France the shift broadly experienced across Western European society. Using the term ‘ultramodernité’, French sociologist Yves Lambert depicts French society in terms of a general ‘rejection of traditional and religious sources of authority in favour of reason’ (Comeau, 2002, p522). The most relevant effect of this to our discussion is the further diminishing of the acceptance of the Bible as the authoritative Word of God.

This has also been a factor in the ‘disassociating of the spiritual need and the question of truth’ (Colin, 2000, p71). Commonly termed by sociologists as ‘bricolage religieux’ (‘religious DIY’), this pluralistic philosophy consists of ‘borrowing from one or another method of spirituality without adhering to the world view which justifies those spiritualities by anchoring them in reality’ (Colin, 2000, p71).

Critical Evaluation of the translation

Such underlying cultural assumptions bear direct relevance to the translation of a Bible-based evangelistic course, as highlighted by Eddie Arthur, (2008) ‘the role of a Bible translator is to adapt Scripture in an appropriate fashion for a given cultural and linguistic setting’. Having identified specific ‘distinctives’ of this setting, an analysis of the linguistic translation will focus on the Alpha Manuals (referred to using the abbreviations (AMUK) for the English and (AMFR) for the French version) and Gumbel’s original audio-video talks which have been recently remade in French, with Marc de Leyritz speaking. In order to allow meaningful detail within the restrictions of this essay it will be helpful to focus on the first session, which, serving as an introduction to Alpha, must meet visitors at their starting point in order to inspire them to proceed with the course.

i) Overview

An overall comparison reveals alterations in the translated content of Alpha France which demonstrate sensitivity to the underlying identification and respect of the Catholic Church. For instance the addition of an explanation before the contents page of the French manual explains not only how the course runs but also the fact that Alpha has expanded across the world within all denominations of Christianity (AMFR, p4), serving to recognise unity and inferring a stamp of approval from the Catholic Church. The word ‘parish’ is also added in French to replace the single phrase ‘local church’ (AMUK, p57) with ‘La paroisse / l’église locale’ (AMFR, p65). In placing the French Catholic term (parish) before the independent
protestant term for church, this serves to be especially inclusive to a Catholic perspective. Similarly changes are made throughout from ‘Pastor’ to include ‘Priest or Pastor’.

Humour is effectively adapted to avoid a culturally inappropriate implication of disrespect. Toning down humorous implications from around half of the sketches in the English manual, for example in Chapter 7, ‘How can I Resist Evil?’, the English cartoon depicts a man wondering if ‘garlic’ might help (AMUK, p41), while the French shows him reading the Bible (AMFR, p47). De Leyritz also makes appropriate replacements of humorous anecdotes relating to Catholic Church, rather than UK culture and includes several references that link with the Catholic Church in stories or quotations. For example, in the Introductory Talk, Gumbel portrays the human need for God citing Freddie Mercury as a man who had everything but despaired he felt like the ‘loneliest man on earth’ (An Introduction to Alpha, 2012). De Leyritz replaces this with the words of a Priest, who emphasised the need to know if there is life before death; ‘il faut savoir s’il y a une vie avant la mort’. Similarly, an extra quotation is listed from Pope Jean-Paul II (AMFR, 2006, p28) to contribute to the list of quotations used to argue the need for common sense in following God’s guidance.

ii) Sensitivity to Catholic Culture

In light of Cork’s criticism of an over-Charismatic agenda, it is significant to note that the proportion of space given to the subjects is altered in translation. For instance, the third weekend talk, entitled ‘How can I be filled with the Holy Spirit?’ (AMUK, p37-40), omits over 2 pages and fifteen bullet points in the French (AMFR, p45-46), most of which discuss the gift of tongues. This is substituted with the brief statement that the disciples received a new language; ‘Ils ont reçu un nouveau langage’. The word ‘langage’ (language) is used in place of the word ‘langue’ (tongue) which is the word used in the major French Bible translations (for example Louis Seconde and Le Semeur). This exchange serves to retain a sympathetic ambiguity regarding the nature of the language received by the Holy Spirit, i.e., angelic or human. This is a helpful subtlety which allows room for flexibility within denominational interpretation. Similarly, chapter 9, a study of the practice of ‘Healing Today’ omits the inclusion of the English subheading ‘Words of Knowledge’ and the following list of ways to experience this gift, such as ‘pictures’ and ‘sympathy pain’ (AMUK, p55).

The question in the Introductory Chapter, (AMUK, p1) regarding ‘what has [Christianity] got to do with life today?’ is personalised to become ‘my life today’, (‘ma vie d’aujourd’hui’) (AMFR, p7). This personalisation is echoed in de Leyritz’s Introductory Talk. In view of the ‘autonomous individualism’ (Comeau, 2002, p522) broadly recognised in French society, this is an insightful way to meet a French listener at their starting point. However the following two instances of translation into French miss an essential opportunity to contextualise personal faith in terms of the Church, which would bring a balance necessary to avoid presenting the individualistic Christianity of which Alpha is accused. Firstly, at the end of section 1, the ‘birth and growth of the Christian Church’ (AMUK, p8) is highlighted as a consequence following the life of Jesus. This context of belonging to God’s people brings perspective to the question of faith in the public and private arenas. Secondly, in the first weekend session entitled ‘Who is the Holy Spirit?’ a link is drawn in the English text between water baptism and baptism in the Spirit, involving an explanation of the Greek term ‘baptizo’, meaning ‘to overwhelm, immerse’ (AMUK, p40). This is reinforced with three additional examples from the life of Jesus including the fact that Jesus received power from the Holy Spirit at his baptism (AMUK, p32). These links helpfully ground in Church community, a concept that may be negatively misunderstood as heavily dependent on personal experience, and perhaps Cultish.

Chapter 6, entitled ‘How does God Guide us?’ contains a subheading discussing the ‘counsel of saints’ (AMUK, p28) or ‘Le conseil des saints’ (AMFR, p34). Based on several Proverbs,
the intended meaning is to direct a believer to listen to the advice of other Christians. However, the implication of the word ‘saint’ to the majority of a French audience strongly denotes canonized saints and the souls of people who have died, compounded by the common Catholic practice of praying to Saints for guidance and protection - which caused misunderstanding during an Alpha group in Perpignan, France, in October 2011 (my own context). The expression could easily be reworded to avoid this.

iii) c) Bible Engagement, the Metanarrative

Having discussed the increasing chasm in France between assumptions about reality from a Biblical worldview, it is unfortunate that three elements of the overarching story of God’s redemptive purpose in *missio Dei* are inadequately translated in the manual. Firstly, the idea of mankind being created in God’s image is mentioned briefly in both editions (AMUK,p 2, AMUK, p8). However it would be appropriate to a more highly secularised society to allow time in French Alpha to linger on the subject of creation, and in particular to explore the crucial concept of God’s purpose for his creation. Moreover, while extra supplementary reading is listed at the end to enable further study of this theme, there is nothing listed in the French (nor for any other chapter) which is a significant flaw to effective Bible Engagement. Although Gumbel’s *Questions of Life* was not published in French until 2006, other French sources should be recommended.

Secondly, (AMFR, p10) the French focus is more closely on five claims that Jesus makes about himself, while the English text goes on to explore an additional six points noting the invitations to respond to Jesus, such as ‘receive me’ and ‘welcome me’(AMUK, p5). This adaptation appropriately simplifies the focus on Jesus as; the bread of life, (John 6:35), the light of world (John 8:12) and the resurrection (John 11:25) (AMFR, p11) and crucially allows space for the inclusion of fuller Bible citations in the text. These Scriptures connect with the most attended Catholic occasions of first Communion, Christmas Mass, and funerals. In this way a connection is created to what may be familiar of the Bible to honour what is already known, reinforcing the unity of the Message across denominations. Conversely a similar opportunity is missed in session 2 entitled ‘Why Did Jesus Die?’ where the crucial Scripture, John 3:16, is majored in a text box in English, (AMUK, p8) but is inexplicably missing in the French booklet.

Thirdly, the Model of the Lord’s Prayer involves the addition of three (AMUK, p19) additional explanations of the Kingdom of God in English, which are omitted in French. This includes the return of Jesus. Although certain theological simplifications elsewhere are helpful, (such as the ‘self-substitution of God’ (AMUK, p10) that is translated simply as ‘he died for us’), the return of Jesus is imperative to the Bible’s Metanarrative. For this reason it should not have been ignored.

iv) Bible Authority

In Session 1 the phrase ‘Sources of evidence outside the New Testament’ (AMUK, p3), is poorly translated as ‘Sources non-Chrétiennes’. Such categorising in terms of ‘non-Christian sources’ implies a false distinction between the discipline of History from ‘Christian history’. This risks a reinforcement of the cultural gulf between beliefs relating to God and ‘facts’ about the world, which Bjork (1997, p32) exacts in terms of French culture,

Revolution against political authority called into question divine authority [...] Liberalism in thought lead to scepticism. These secularizing forces affected most of Western society [...] but in France generations of religious and ideological conflict led to what some have labelled “utter secularity”
In the English manual, ‘the Bible’ is listed first in response to the question why we should believe that the Devil exists (AMUK, p42). In French, la Bible is listed third, following the subheadings of ‘Le bon sens’ (common sense) and ‘L’expérience chrétienne’ (AMFR, p48).

It may be argued that it makes sense to use the Bible to reinforce something true that may be known by human intellect and experience in a context where, as discussed above, Biblical authority is not an easily accepted concept. However, the following example shows a missed opportunity to help reintroduce faith in the Word: following the discussion in Session 6, ‘How God guides us’, a list is given (AMUK, p27) of four ways to test if it is really God, which include the crucial question ‘is it in line with the Bible?’. This is also unjustifiably omitted in French, undermining the fundamental Christian principle of Biblical authority.

v) French Philosophy

Certain examples of translation reflect the cultural conception of objective truth and reality which in France is more strongly influenced by scepticism, linking with the widely studied French rationalist philosopher, René Descartes. Featuring in the introductory discussion of Christianity, the English term ‘reality’ (p1) is replaced in French by ‘Le sens du real’ (p7), meaning ‘the sense of something real’. However, in contradiction with the accusations facing Alpha’s inability to adapt, de Leyritz uses several excellent revisions, evidenced in the following example.

In discussing the implications of Jesus statement “I am the Truth” he begins with Gumbel’s metaphor of the way an aerial connects a television to bring a clear picture, rather than the fuzzy, intermittent transmission it received before. This is a crucial acknowledgement that the idea of absolute truth is generally counter-cultural in the post-modern West. But there is a difference in the way the two speakers proceed to argue that something must either be ‘true for no one’, or ‘true for everyone’. In a society in philosophical discussion of reality replaces religious truth in moral and political spheres, a philosophical defence of the possibility of absolute truth is of primary relevance and is a crucial bridge to enable a French audience to be open to what follows from the premise that Jesus is the Truth.

He therefore goes on to make the point that people have a legitimate suspicion regarding something that claims to be truth, due to the gap that often exists in our society between the way reality is portrayed in popular culture, from what is actually real. Such a false reality is ‘constantly put before us on our screens’ (‘le real est ce qu’on fait paraître sur l’écran’) such as ‘l’air de Disneyland, de Nintendo’. But, he argues, this is not real, it is not truth. De Leyritz rightly does not presume that a cautious audience can or should simply make the jump to accepting the concept of absolute truth and provides the logical step that if something may be correctly agreed upon as not the truth, then the reverse may also be possible.

This is an important development from the television metaphor, to which a French audience may respond with the problem that, even with the aerial, how do I know that what is being transmitted is true? This is because such a depiction of a separation between ‘truth’ from perceived reality is reminiscent of Descartes’ scepticism. According to this philosophy, external data, such as what we see and touch, enters the mind via the senses and is encountered in an undisclosed world of experience, like a private theatre within the mind. This image remains a popular symbol of a separation between reality which is mediated via infallible senses from knowledge perceived in the conscious mind.

De Leyritz’s picture of the world mediated to people via the unreliable screen therefore makes a simple but important connection to the faulty theatre. He then recounts another good-humoured anecdote, involving a pilot who is about to land his plane, following the data received on his screen. However a technological fault is causing the monitor to display a reversal of ‘right’ from ‘left’. As de Leyritz underlines, ‘for the pilot the screen is not a true reflection of reality - unlike the mountain he just flew into!’ (my translation). In this way, the
French translation reinforces that a ‘reality’ or truth must exist, and that is God. This makes Gumbel’s initial implication that Jesus is claiming to be like the authentic ‘aerial’ which connects us to him, more culturally accessible.

**Conclusion**

Contrary to criticism, a focus upon three ‘distinctives’ evident in French culture, Alpha France has shown a significant degree of a willingness to be ‘tailored’, demonstrating effective cultural contextualisation. This is owed in part, as Rompaey rightly discerns, to the patient process of translation involving Catholic Bishops as well as French and UK protestant leaders; creating, in Alpha France, the paradox a ‘space of freedom that is structured by theologians’ (Rompaey, 2010).

In a country which has suffered a history of notorious religious conflict, Alpha’s contribution to the work of Church unity is a significant achievement recognised in media coverage, exemplified in the Newspaper *Ouest France*, which, cited inside the cover of de Leyritz’s book (2007), reports ‘c’est un peu l’Assimil de la foi chrétienne’. This likens Alpha France to a Christian version of best-selling language course ‘l’Assimil’ popular for making languages accessible to everyone.

More than just evangelism, Alpha France enables spiritual formation advocated as it breaks the mould of a passive congregation not only encouraging ‘dialogue and participation’ but also the ‘involvement of church members and the use of their gifts’ (Hassenforder, 2001, pp12-13) creating, what Hassenforder (2003) describes as a new culture, ‘la culture Alpha’. This may be seen as ‘a witness to the unifying power of the gospel which supersedes all cultural divisions’ (Guder, 2000, p69).

Alpha France is not a perfect example of Bible Engagement, and Rompaey overstates (2010) its virtues in crediting it as presenting the ‘purity of the Gospel message’ (‘la pureté du message évangélique). It omits certain Bible texts that are essential to the theme of *missio Dei* and contains avoidable ambiguities. Many European Baptists also criticise Alpha’s lack of attention to ‘baptism’ and ‘holistic community discipleship’ and paradoxically ‘incorrectly perceive it as Roman Catholic’ (Jackson, 2005, p1). However the irony of such an interpretation serves as evidence to the impossibility of achieving flawless translation, which ‘takes place in the ambiguity of human frailty and cultural limitations’ (Guder, 2000, p92). Yet despite aspects of translation in Alpha France that may benefit from a greater commitment to Walls’ principle (1996, p9) of ‘continuous revision’, evidence shows that God is powerfully at work to bring about restoration and redemption in France according his purpose revealed in the *missio Dei*. As Hassenforder (2003) brings into perspective, it is ‘by the grace of God he uses means and processes of touching people with his Word’. He is using not only the message but also the atmosphere symbolic of the triune characteristics of trust, friendship and unity that is recognised by the French as the ‘culture’ of Alpha France.

**Citations**


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