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Lecture II

Formal and Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation

Pres. Paul Wendland

Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary

Mequon, Wisconsin

Those of you with memories stretching back to the nineteen seventies will doubtless recall the ads that launched Miller Lite. Burly sports figures engaged in heated debate: “Tastes great!” “Less filling!” The argument see-sawed back and forth, with each side apparently unwilling to give in to the other. What made the ads so funny was, of course, the fact that they were apparently fiercely divided over their different reasons for liking the same product.

In the translation discussions I¹ have participated in for the past few years, I have had a sense at times that something vaguely similar was going on: people passionately contending for different ways of translating the same Bible. I do not believe the issue is at bottom one of accuracy or faithfulness (concepts which in themselves are not all that easy to nail down). I believe that the NIV, the HCSB, the ESV and the NKJV are all translated by people who have a high view of Scripture and who see the Bible’s message centering in Christ. Rather, the matter has more to do with translational preference. More specifically: whether one prefers a functionally or a formally equivalent translation of the Bible.

In saying this, I have no wish to be understood as saying that translating the Bible is an unimportant enterprise. Nor am I suggesting that we should simply give up talking about the best way to do it. This is obviously a matter over which people have strong feelings and reasons—even pastoral ones—for their preferences. They have a right to them. Some, because of such concerns, may prefer not to use a translation like the new NIV. I can understand and respect this point of view. I am merely saying that this is a matter over which godly people can honestly disagree. Above all, I don't wish to demonize those who come to a different conclusion than I have. God has blessed us with a rich array of

¹ I come to this discussion as a non-expert. What I know, I know from my discussions with my brother, Dr. E.R. Wendland who for many years has challenged me and deepened my understanding of the complexities of these matters. I also had the privilege of working with him in translating the psalms in one of the initial drafts of the Buku Loyera (the new Chewa version of the Bible). Finally, as the chair of our synod’s Translation Evaluation Committee, I have spent a considerable amount of time reading and reflecting on these matters. In this, my own understanding has received from others far more than it has ever given. I am greatly indebted to my friends and colleagues on this committee: Professors Cherney and Nass, President Joel Petermann, and Pastor John Braun. I would commend their essays and Bible studies to you. <http://www.wels.net/translation>.

translations that we can choose from, all of which are acceptable and all of which have their varying strengths and weaknesses.

So I have some relatively modest hopes for this paper. My goal is not to convince you to become a committed disciple of one approach or the other. I only hope there would be a little less heat and a little more light as we talk about them. Both approaches—formal and functional—have their merits. Both approaches have their limitations. Both approaches have had their advocates who have oversold the case and made what I believe are exaggerated claims for them. If this paper can succeed in at least beginning to make people more aware of the relative merits and demerits of each approach as well as to damp down on some of the overselling, I will be satisfied. I hope we can agree that each approach is useful and that perhaps more helpful are the questions: 1) for what target audience is this translation aimed, and 2) to what uses will it be put? If we can reach that point, I will be happy.

Defining Terms

What do we mean by formal and functional² equivalence? In a *formally equivalent*³ translation, a translator seeks to preserve, as much as he can, the structure of the original. This approach seeks to achieve consistency in translating the same Greek or Hebrew word with the same target-language word, as much as this is possible. It aims to make the original text transparent to the target reader, in some cases even to the point of preserving the word order and syntax of the original.⁴ A *functionally equivalent* translation, by contrast, seeks to communicate above all the meaning of the original, using the most natural forms, words, structures, and idioms of the target language. It aims for the same communicative impact in the target context that the source text had upon the original readers and hearers. Success is achieved when the translation “doesn’t sound like a translation.”^{5 6}

² In many writings the expression “dynamic” equivalence is used instead. Both were coined by Eugene Nida. In 1986 he substituted functional equivalence for his previous term “dynamic equivalence.” He made the change because he was concerned that the earlier term had been misunderstood. He felt that functional equivalence was better since it “served to highlight the communicative functions of translating.” Jan DeWaard and Eugene A. Nida, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation*. 1st ed. Thomas Nelson Inc, 1986, vii-viii.

³ Also called the “formal correspondence” (FC) approach. When abbreviating, I will call this approach FC to distinguish it from the abbreviation FE, which I will use exclusively for *functional* equivalence.

⁴ Adapted from Kenneth A. Cherney, “On Bible Translation and Choosing a Bible.” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108, no. 2 (March 1, 2011): 111–128.

⁵Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation: With Special Reference to Bible Translating*. Reprint. Brill Academic Pub, 1982, 12.

⁶It should be mentioned that there are very few ‘pure’ examples of either type. The best example of a formally equivalent translation of the Bible in English would probably be a Greek or Hebrew interlinear. After that would come Young’s Literal Translation. The best example of functionally equivalent translations might be the Good News Bible or the Common English Bible. Most popular translations mix the two methods. The NIV, for example, is more word for word in some passages than is the ESV. In a programmatic statement found on their webpage, the translators say, “Our aim is to translate the NIV in such a way as to provide the optimum combination of transparency to the original documents and ease of understanding in every verse.” (<http://www.niv-cbt.org/questions/>, accessed Sept 16, 2012). The ESV—which advertises itself as “an essentially literal” translation, admits, “Every translation is at many points a trade-off between literal

Although the above terminology is fairly new, the two different approaches to translation are not. In popular English people generally refer to a formally equivalent translation as being 'word for word,' or 'literal' while a functionally equivalent translation is 'meaning-based,' or 'sense for sense.' Just becoming more aware of the long history of this debate will serve, I believe, to temper overstatements. As we discuss these matters we ought to be aware that we are taking part in a conversation that has spanned millennia. If a definitive solution has eluded others for centuries, it is unlikely that we will hit upon one.

The Translator's Warrant

The first question to be asked is: do we even have a right to translate a sacred text? A question like this may seem obvious. A brief glance at the history of translation makes it clear that the answer is anything but. Even today many a faithful Muslim would answer such a question regarding the Quran with the following:

Muslims regard the Quran as untranslatable; the language in which it was revealed - Arabic - is inseparable from its message and Muslims everywhere, no matter what their native tongue, must learn Arabic to read the Sacred Book and to perform their worship. The Quran of course is available in many languages, but these versions are regarded as interpretations rather than translations - partly because the Arabic language, extraordinarily concise and allusive, is impossible to translate in a mechanical, word for word way. The inimitability of the Quran has crystallized in the Muslim view of *i'jaz* or "impossibility," which holds that the style of the Quran, being divine, cannot be imitated: any attempt to do so is doomed to failure.⁷

Nor is this an isolated case: Iamblichus, a Greek writer of the second century AD, was reluctant to endorse the translation of religious texts because:

In translation, words do not preserve exactly the same sense: each people has characteristics impossible to transfer from one language to another; thus, even though one can translate these words, they still do not preserve the same force.⁸

A few centuries earlier, Ben Sira's grandson made the same observation. He speaks of the weaknesses of his own translation work when compared to his grandfather's original. As an excuse, he points to similar failings in the Septuagint:

Things originally spoken in Hebrew have not the same force in them when they are translated into another tongue: and not only these, but the Law itself, and the Prophecies, and the rest of the books, have no small difference when they are spoken in their original form.⁹

precision and readability, between 'formal equivalence' in expression and 'functional equivalence' in communication, and the ESV is no exception" (ESV Classic Reference Bible. Crossway, 2001, preface).

⁷ From <http://www.islamicity.com/mosque/ihame/Ref1.htm>. Accessed September 16, 2012.

⁸ As qtd in Sebastian Brock, "Aspects of Translation Technique in Antiquity." *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 20, no. 1 (March 1, 2011): 76.

⁹ *Apocrypha of the Old Testament*. 2004 (R. H. Charles, Ed.) (Sir 10). Bellingham, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

But whereas Ben Sira's grandson used this acknowledged weakness to ask for pardon and acceptance of his own work of translation, Iamblichus came to an entirely different conclusion. According to him only the originals could be valid:

The words of the ancient prayers should be kept exactly as they are, as though they were holy sanctuaries: nothing should be removed from them, and nothing added.¹⁰

This consciousness of the 'overriding importance' of the original sacred text formed at least part of the impulse that lay behind those who—like Theodotian, Aquila, and Symmachus—revised the Septuagint with renderings that were far more word for word in translational approach.¹¹ Another part of their motivation was their weariness of having what they considered to be the 'falsified' renderings of the Septuagint continually quoted against them by Christian apologetes. Later on in antiquity, rabbinic Judaism rejected the translational enterprise completely. R. Judah b. Ilai at the end of the second century wrote, "He who translates literally is a falsifier, while he who adds anything (by way of paraphrase) is a blasphemer."¹²

So when, around 250 BC, those legendary seventy translated the Torah¹³ for the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, one cannot underestimate the magnitude of this achievement! This is true on two levels, first that it was attempted at all, and secondly, that it was received by Jews and later by Christians as the Word of God.¹⁴ "The Septuagint is...a unique linguistic monument without analogy in Greek literature of antiquity. No other work of this scale was translated into Greek from a foreign language."¹⁵

But all questions of history aside, what biblical warrant do we have for translating the sacred text? Why have Lutheran Christians consistently referred to translations as the Word of God even though they know that translations are not on a par with the original and that the doctrines of inspiration and inerrancy apply in their fullest sense to what God inspired the original authors to write?

As an answer, our Lutheran dogmaticians point us to 1 Peter 1:23-25:

For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For,

*"All men are like grass,
and all their glory is like the flowers of the field;
the grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of the Lord stands forever."*

¹⁰Brock, *op. cit.*, 76.

¹¹ For more see Martin Hengel, *The Septuagint as Christian Scripture: Its Prehistory and the Problem of Its Canon*. Baker Academic, 2004, 82-83. Also Sebastian Brock, *op. cit.*, 77. Origen described Aquila's method as δουλεύων τη Ἑβραϊκῇ λέξει---in service to the Hebrew way of speaking (Orig. *Ep.* 1.2).

¹² As qtd in Brock, *op. cit.*, 77.

¹³ The other books of the Septuagint were translated later. Most estimates of the entire process range from 350 to 400 years, with the final books being translated in the early 2nd century AD. For more on the subject, see Hengel, *op. cit.*, 19ff and 83ff. and David G. Burke "The First Versions: The Septuagint, the Targums, and the Latin," 59-89 in *History Of Bible Translation*, edited by Phil Noss. Amer Bible Society, 2007.

¹⁴ Indeed, as we will discuss later when we look at St. Jerome's debate with St. Augustine, the Septuagint had achieved inspired status among many.

¹⁵ Hengel, *op. cit.*, xi.

And this is the word that was preached to you.

From this they argue that the *essence* of the Word of God cannot be “the syllables, the sounds, and the words.” If it were otherwise, “Scripture would contradict itself, since according to Scripture itself, words, syllables, and letters can be destroyed (Je 36:27). [This passage and others rather assert] that God’s Word...is eternal.”¹⁶ What makes this New Testament quotation so apt is that Peter is citing the Septuagint translation of Isaiah 40:6 and 8. Clearly he treats the text as authoritative, even though the original Hebrew words and syllables are not present. For this reason, we consider the divine meaning to be the essential quality that “makes” a particular writing to be the Word of God, whether it is the meaning as it is conveyed by the original tongues, or the meaning as conveyed by a faithful translation of them.¹⁷

This then is the warrant of the translator.

Translational Characteristics of the Septuagint

The question of whether a ‘sense for sense’ or a ‘word for word’ translation is to be preferred arises already when one considers the translational characteristics of the Septuagint (LXX). The translation of the Torah—the first section of the Septuagint that was completed—generally follows the Masoretic text. It tends to be more ‘word for word’ in its approach. Decisions made by these early translators on how to handle certain words had a great influence on the vocabulary of the rest of the books.

Their decisions must have been difficult, but choices such as using *dikaioi* for *tsaddiq* ‘righteous’ and *doxa* for *kabod* ‘glory’ proved well made. On the other hand, choices such as *alētheia* ‘truth, not hidden’ for ‘*emet* ‘trust’ or *kalos* ‘good’ for *tob* ‘good, beautiful’ were only partially synonymous. Much worse, the choices involving *nomos* ‘law’ for *torah* ‘instruction, teaching’...were fateful and seriously constricted or changed the meaning of those important Hebrew terms.¹⁸

One of the limitations of word for word translations is well illustrated here. Words in one language are often difficult to match up in another. Even when you find a close equivalent, it rarely occupies the exact same semantic domain (that is to say, has the exact same range of meanings) of the word in the original. Nuances will be lost. Distortions can creep in. Consider the word *logos*. As every first year Greek student knows, the English

¹⁶ Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics*. Northwestern Pub House, 1999, vol. 4, 5.

¹⁷ Gerhard and Quenstedt said similar things. See Gerhard’s *Loci Theologici* I.14, and Quenstedt as qtd. by Hoenecke *ibid.*, 5-6, “When used with regard to the essence, the name ‘Holy Scripture’ is used for the divine meaning indicated by the words...the matter of Scripture is the letters, words, and writing.” Consider, too, the differences in the Words of Institution as reported in the Synoptics and by the Apostle Paul. Lutherans have never been troubled by the thought that there are slight variations in what Jesus is reported to have said. We affirm that, in every case, the holy writer is preserving the sense of what Jesus said, the divinely intended meaning.

Again this is not to say that that the forms of the original are unimportant. Indeed, Quenstedt can affirm that the “external essence” of Scripture is the character of the speech, the style and the idioms of Hebrew and Greek. Lutherans revere the fact that God inspired his eternal Word originally in the forms and idioms of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek. Translations must be governed by the original and their accuracy assessed by their faithfulness to the original’s meaning.

¹⁸ Burke, *op. cit.*, 66.

gloss for *logos* is 'word.' But even more formally equivalent translations like the ESV find it impossible to use a single English expression to render it. Depending on the context, the ESV translators also use 'message,' 'saying,' 'news,' 'account,' and even 'question' to handle it.

In the Septuagint, another clear example of this limitation might be in the way the Greek word *eirēnē* 'peace' was substituted for the Hebrew word *shalom* 'health, wholeness, well-being.'

[In] Second Samuel 11:7...when Uriah comes before David, the king asks 'how the war prospered.' The Hebrew is *welishlom hammilhamah*, which...means '[he asked] into the well-being of the war.' But the limited range of *eirēnē* makes the Greek awkward: *eis eirēnēn tou polomou*, which is...'[he asked] into the peace of the war.'¹⁹

I would say that Prof. Burke is being too kind here. It's more than awkward; it's gobbledygook!

As a whole, the Septuagint demonstrates both word for word and meaning-oriented approaches. The more word for word books include Judges (B text), Psalms, Ecclesiastes, Lamentations, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Chronicles. Among the more meaning-oriented we find Job, Proverbs, Isaiah, Daniel, and Esther. "The remaining books range between these poles."²⁰

Also germane to the discussion is the widely noted fact that the Septuagint demonstrates a "noticeable concern" to reduce anthropomorphisms. Psalms 28 (LXX 27) and 31 (LXX 30) provide examples. In both instances, the metaphor *tsur* 'rock' is avoided in the Greek. In the first instance where David addresses God as "my rock," the Septuagint substitutes *kurie* "O Lord." In the second instance (Psalm 31:3), David says to God, *Heyeh li letsur ma'oz* "Be(come) for me as a rock of refuge." In the Septuagint, "Be(come) for me as God, Protector." It is likely that this approach was followed in the interests of better communication, that is, to forestall misunderstanding in a translation that would be used in an idolatrous context.²¹

From the Septuagint, then, one would have a difficult time establishing the thesis that a word for word approach is more 'biblical' than sense for sense. Clearly the early Christians' Bible demonstrated a mixture of approaches. Furthermore, the New Testament alludes to or quotes from the Septuagint over eighty percent of the time. While one would hesitate to infer from this that the New Testament therefore 'sanctifies' both approaches, one can at least say that, from the writings of the apostles, a person cannot justify a claim that a word for word approach is the only right way. To bear this out it might be helpful briefly to consider a few examples from the New Testament.

Three New Testament Examples

An area of great interest in hermeneutics these days is the whole question of the use of the Old Testament in the New. It would take us too far afield to tackle a topic so complex. But for the matter at hand, it might be useful to point out three concrete examples of how New Testament authors quoted the Old Testament. The first is John 10:34-35, where Jesus

¹⁹ Burke, *op. cit.*, 66.

²⁰ Burke, *op. cit.*, 68.

²¹ For more see Burke, *op. cit.*, 67, and Hengel, *op.cit.*, 16.

cites Psalm 82:6 (LXX), “I said, you are gods,” and then bases his entire argument on a single word, adding “and the Scripture cannot be broken.” While the meaning is certainly the most important factor, there are times when (to paraphrase Luther) the whole sense of a passage hangs upon a single word. Jesus himself reminds us of that.

The second example is a little more complex and is most helpful if one has knowledge of the original languages. I will try to remove the difficulties by supplying my own word for word translation for the originals as well as put a number key beside places where I intend to make translational or exegetical points.

The passage under discussion is Psalm 32:1-2 as Paul quotes it from the Septuagint in Romans 4:4-8. First let’s consider a word for word rendering of the Hebrew original:

O the blessings of the one whose (sing. masc. ①) rebellion is taken away,
whose (sing. masc. ①) sin is covered!
O the blessings of the man (Hbr: *Adam* ②) to whom the LORD does not
credit/calculate guilt.

This raises the question: how should a person handle the words in this passage that are masculine in gender? Some might say that the single word ‘Adam’ should settle the matter for us. “Man is man, Adam is Adam—don’t distort the truth when translating” they would argue. But it is not so simple. Quite apart from the fact that there is never a perfect overlap between the word maps of different languages, linguists and grammarians have long recognized the truth that Professor Moo summarizes for us in the following:

There are, of course, some words in both Greek and Hebrew that undeniably refer to either a man (or men) or a woman (or women). But many of the most common words can function either exclusively (men as opposed to women) or inclusively (men and women equally). The actual words and the form of the words do not tell us which it is.²²

This will become more clear, I hope, as we examine the passage as it appears in Romans. Since Paul’s lead up to the passage is also very helpful, allow me to bring those verses into the discussion as well. Again, a word for word rendering follows:

To the one who is working (sing. masc. + generic article ③), the wage is not credited/calculated by way of gift, but by way of debt. To the one who is not working but believing in him (sing. masc. + generic article ③) who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited/calculated as righteousness. Just as David, too, speaks of the blessed state of the person (Gk: *anthrōpos* ④) to whom God credits/calculates righteousness apart from works:

O the blessings of those whose (pl. masc ⑤) lawlessnesses have been forgiven
whose sins (pl. masc ⑤) have been covered.
O the blessing of the man (Gk: *anēr* ⑥) whose sin the Lord will never calculate/credit.

²² In *Which Bible Translation Should I Use?: A Comparison of 4 Major Recent Versions* Andreas J. Köstenberger, David A. Croteau, eds. B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition (Kindle Locations 1918-1921).

What's so interesting about this example is the rather free, yet entirely appropriate way both the Septuagint and Paul handle the Hebrew original, especially with respect to grammatical gender. Paul's treatment also has implications for how he understood the word *Adam/anēr/man*—whether as an inclusive or as an exclusive term. This is worth careful observation on our parts because some have detected important theological truths embedded in grammatical gender.²³ They furthermore believe that a serious loss of meaning occurs whenever a singular masculine pronoun is translated with a plural.²⁴

It's quite clear in context that David is making a generalizing introductory statement based upon his own experience, the details of which will follow. The point he wishes to emphasize is that God's forgiving of our sins is the only way that any human being can enjoy the blessed state of being righteous before God. To put it another way, the Hebrew begins with two generic²⁵ masculine singulars (Ⓚ) which the Septuagint renders with plurals "those who" (Ⓛ). Paul quotes it without change, thus indicating that the Septuagint gives a perfectly appropriate translation of the Hebrew.

David clearly does not mean to restrict this blessedness to males, or even to the male as the representative head of both genders. To bring in such ideas here is to introduce concepts utterly foreign to the context and line of thought. Rather, *Adam* is defined by its usage in context as an individualizing reference to the entire human race.²⁶ That is, David does not mean to say: "Oh the blessings of every *Adam*..." nor even so much: "Oh the blessings of mankind..." but: "Oh the blessings of any human being."

²³ Grammatical gender is a feature of some languages (such as French, German, ancient Greek, and ancient Hebrew) whereby gender is assigned to nouns in a rather arbitrary way, not because there is necessarily any intrinsic maleness or femaleness involved with the nouns as such. The grammatical gender rather serves to signal agreement between the noun and words that are linked to it, such as adjectives and pronouns. 'Confusion,' for example is masculine in Greek, whereas 'tranquility' is feminine. A 'spirit' in Hebrew is feminine, but neuter in Greek. Why this should be so is for reasons of grammatical agreement, not because the peoples in question perceived a male characteristic in the idea of confusion, or a female quality in 'spirit.'

²⁴ For one example, see the CTCR's staff statement on the NIV 2011 found at <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1935>, accessed September 22, 2012, where the writers consider the substitution of singular masculine nouns with plural forms to be a "serious theological weakness" (p. 4). The most pithy rejoinder I have seen to this point is that of Prof. Joel Fredrich of New Ulm who once wrote, "Grammatical details within a language help to make clear connections between words in that language, but they have no theological significance by themselves. There is no reason for us to turn English into Heblish or Greekish or Heeklish." From "Some gender issues in translating the Bible into English" a paper delivered at Monroe Michigan, January 16, 2012.

²⁵ When I use the term *generic*, I am referring to another grammatical feature by which one class of things is distinguished from other classes. A generic would be used to distinguish a human being from an animal, a Greek from a Jew, or even males as a class from females. The point here is to distinguish those people who—as a class—enjoy the blessed state of forgiveness. See Wallace *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 227ff. Again different languages express this in different ways. The Greek often signals a generic expression by using the definite article. In English, more often than not, we express this same idea with an indefinite article—a feature which Greek lacks. The Greek article—though masculine in gender—does not have an inherently male component of meaning.

²⁶ Commenting on Psalm 1 where there are similar issues, Prof Moo says, "Advocates of the translation 'man' sometimes argue that the original text refers to a 'blessed' male, who then becomes representative of all people. So 'man' should be kept in Psalm 1: 1 even though the verse ultimately includes men and women equally. The problem with this approach is twofold. First, how do we know the original author was referring to a male? As we have seen, the Hebrew word does not tell us this, and nothing in the context makes this clear." Kostenberger/Croteau, *op.cit.*, (Kindle Locations 2000-2003).

Just like David, Paul wishes to illustrate the truth that justification by faith is the only way for anyone to receive the righteousness of God. So he quotes David's well-known words. Notice the way Paul precedes his quotation by three participles, all attributive with generic articles (③), "To the one who works...to the one who does not work but believes." Note too how Paul sets up the quotation by using *anthrōpos* ④ (a word which everyone agrees is generic in its reference, 'person, human being'). These are all lined up as synonymous in meaning with the two generic plurals of the Septuagint (⑤). As a final parallel, observe how Paul employs the Septuagint's rendering of *Adam* with *anēr* (⑥), thus signaling again *anēr's* generic quality in this context. Just like *Adam*, it is best translated in English with 'a person' or 'a human being,' or even as 'someone.'²⁷

The final New Testament example approaches even more closely, perhaps, to the techniques of a functionally equivalent translation. I have in mind here Matthew 2:5-6, where we hear the chief priests and scholars quoting from Micah 5:1. A word for word rendering of the Hebrew runs as follows:

And you, Bethlehem, Ephratha, little for being among the thousands of Judah
From you he will go out for me to become ruler in Israel.

The Septuagint translation is quite literal here. But not the translation in Matthew. There we read: **so far**

And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,
By no means are you least among Judah's rulers!
For from you will go out a ruler.

And then the Jerusalem scholars added and adapted a verse from Samuel (2 Sm 5:2):

He will shepherd my people Israel.

This is the sort of translation, I suppose, that could make someone question the accuracy of Old Testament quotations in the New Testament. If a person operates with the notion that only a literal translation is acceptable, then one encounters some difficulty in justifying this verse. But if one simply says, "Here the scholars in Jerusalem are accurately conveying the divinely intended meaning of the original"—even if they do it in almost the manner of a paraphrase²⁸—then the problems fall away.

To sum up this section, when everything hangs upon a particular word or phrase in the original, we observe the New Testament following a word for word approach. But we can also see that the New Testament has no problem with sense for sense renderings when the words accurately represent the divinely intended meaning of the original.

²⁷ Our standard Greek dictionary tells us, "[This is] an equivalent to the M/F form τις" See BDAG 2 or (if you prefer a dictionary written before the feminist debate): BAGD 6.

²⁸ Clarifying 'Ephratha' with 'the land of Judah' and paraphrasing the words 'are little' with, 'are by no means least.' This, of course, is the ultimate thrust of the passage since Bethlehem, though little, would know the distinct honor as the place where Messiah would be born.

The Gourd and the Ivy: Jerome's Vulgate Translation

Jerome is contested ground. Some see him as the undisputed champion of a word for word approach in translating Scripture.²⁹ Others, notably Eugene Nida, claim him for the sense for sense school.³⁰ This is hardly surprising because Jerome made programmatic statements on both sides of the issue. In his widely quoted *Letter # 57: To Pammachius*, he writes:

I not only admit, I freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek—except in the case of the Holy Scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery—I render sense for sense, not word for word...I need only mention [as others who have done the same] Hilary the Confessor who translated...from Greek to Latin. But he refused to stick to the drowsiness of the letter and chain himself with stale and vulgar literalism. Like a conqueror, he led away captive into his own language the meaning of the originals.³¹

It almost seems as if Jerome is contradicting himself!

To untie the knot, some have pointed out that his main point in this section is to give a defense of a rather free translation he had made of *a papal letter*, but that he explicitly disavows this approach in translating *the Scriptures* “where even the order of the words is a mystery.” This does not solve the problem, however, since later in the same letter he asserts that the translator of Scripture, too, has to be faithful to the sense (*Epistulae* 57:10): “*Non verba in Scripturis consideranda sed sensus*—with Scripture, it’s not the words that must be taken into account, but the meaning.” It’s as if he hasn’t quite made up his mind and so wants to express himself cautiously.

Jerome certainly had reason to exercise caution when it came to Bible translation, not only because of the nature of the Scriptures themselves, but also because of the context in which he was translating them. First of all, the practice of allegorizing the meaning(s) of the Scripture was a widely accepted interpretative strategy. That meant people were paying close attention to scriptural items like incongruities in word order, Hebrew place names, difficult phrases, and repeated expressions. Interpreters often sought to ‘unpack’ the mystic meanings that they thought lay concealed under these striking word formations.³² Besides this, Jerome would be sailing against the winds of a translational tradition. No wonder he displayed some initial reluctance in accepting the commission of Pope Damasus to revise the Latin versions of the gospels:³³

²⁹ See Michael Marlowe’s article at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/vulgate4.html>, accessed September 23, 2012. I must say, while he accuses Nida of “shoddy scholarship,” his own airy assumptions and casual brushing away of evidence does not impress.

³⁰ See Jan DeWaard and Eugene A. Nida, *Folta*, 183.

³¹ As qtd. and translated in William Arrowsmith, “Jerome on Translation: A Breviary.” *Arion* 2, no. 3 (January 1, 1975), 358–367.

³² I have written elsewhere on this subject in “Is Allegorizing a Legitimate Manner of Biblical Interpretation” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 103:3 (September 2006).

³³ Prior to Jerome’s version, there were a plethora of older Latin versions. As Augustine put it, “Qui enim scripturas ex Hebraea lingua in Graecam verterunt, numerari possunt, Latini autem interpretes nullo modo. Ut enim cuique primis fidei temporibus in manus venit codex Graecus, etaliquantulum facultatis sibi utriusque linguae habere videbatur, ausus est interpretari—One can at least count those who translated the Scriptures from Hebrew to Greek. Such is by no means the case with Latin. In early Christian times, whenever a Greek manuscript came into someone’s hands he was rash enough to translate it, however little facility he had in either language.” *De Doctrina Christiana* 2. 11.

You urge me to revise the Old Latin version and, as it were, to sit in judgment on copies of the Scriptures that are now scattered throughout the world...The labor is one of love, but at the same time presumptuous, for in judging others I must be content to be judged. Is there anyone learned or unlearned who, when he takes the volume in his hands and perceives that what he reads does not suit his settled tastes, will not break out immediately into violent language and call me a forger and profane person for having the audacity to add anything to the ancient books, or make any changes or corrections in them?³⁴

His fears were not unfounded. When he came out with a new translation of Jonah, the substitution of the single word 'ivy' for 'gourd' caused a riot in a North African church!³⁵

As to his overall approach to translating the Scriptures, judging from the evidence of the translation itself, I am content to remain with Benjamin Kedar's fairly cautious assessment, "Jerome's translation displays an unevenness...the Psalter and Prophets exhibit adherence to the linguistic structure of the source language, while Joshua and Judges, Ruth and Esther abound in free renderings."³⁶ Does this reflect an evolving view towards the translation methodology most appropriate for the Scriptures? Kedar thinks so. He concludes:

It can hardly be a coincidence that [the Psalter and the Prophets] were the early products of Jerome's labor, [Joshua, Judges, Ruth, and Esther] constitute the concluding part: step by step, as Jerome grew more and more assured and practiced, he turned his attention to the sense of the complete statement, leaving aside its linguistic constituents.³⁷

It might help to give some specific examples. As we examine them, we will want to bear in mind that a Hebrew writer has no qualms about repeating words and phrases; Latin prefers to use different synonyms to relieve the monotony. Latin adores subordinate clauses. It abhors the paratactic structure (and...and...and) so favored by Hebrew. These examples will make clear that, in some places, Jerome adheres closely to the original. In others, he does not:³⁸

Jonah 1:5-6:³⁹

And the sailors were afraid, and they cried out, each (*ish* distributive) to his own god, and they cast the cargo (*kēlim*—vessels, articles, utensils, stuff) which was in the ship [merchant ship] into the sea to lighten [it] from upon them. And Jonah went down into the far reaches of the ship [one with a deck], and he lay down and fell into a deep sleep (word for word Hebrew).

³⁴ *Epistula ad Damasum*, as qtd in Bruce Metzger "Important Early Translations of the Bible." *Bibliotheca Sacra* v. 150, (July-March, 1993), 47.

³⁵ For more on the story, see Justo L. Gonzalez, *Story of Christianity: Volume 1, The Early Church to the Dawn of the Reformation*, HarperCollins, 2010, 238ff.

³⁶ Benjamin Kedar, "The Latin Translations" in *Mikra: Text, Translation, Reading & Interpretation of the Hebrew Bible in Ancient Judaism & Early Christianity*, M. J Mulder and Harry Sysling, ed. Hendrickson Publishers, 2005, 326.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 326.

³⁸ For more, see J.N.D Kelly, *Jerome, His Life, writings, and Controversies*, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, 162-163; and Burke, *op. cit.*, 88-89.

³⁹ I am dependent on Kedar for these examples, *op. cit.*, 314-315 and 326-327.

Old Latin	Old Latin Translation	Vulgate	Vulgate Translation
Et timuerunt nautae	And the sailors were afraid	Et timuerunt nautae timore magno	And the sailors feared with a great fear
et proclamaverunt	and they cried out	et clamaverunt	and the men cried out
unusquisque ad dominum suum	each to his own master	viri ad deum suum	to their own god
et iactum fecerunt vasorum	and they made a casting overboard of the vessels	et miserunt vasa	and they threw off the vessels
quae erant in navi	which were on the ship	quae erant in navi	which were on the ship
in mare ut alleviarentur ab eis	upon the sea that it might be lightened of them (i.e. that the ship be freed from its weight)	in mare ut alleviarentur ab eis	upon the sea that it might be lightened of them (i.e. that the ship be freed from its weight)
Jonas autem discenderat	But Jonah had gone down	et Jonas descendit	and Jonah went down
in ventrem navis	into the belly of the ship	ad interiora navis	to the inner part of the ship
et dormiebat et stertebat	and he was sleeping and snoring	et dormiebat sopore gravi	and he was sleeping with a very deep sleep

Here we see a mostly word for word translation in both versions. Jerome has not introduced any major changes in the style of the original. For one thing, Jerome and the Old Latin preserve the paratactic style of the narrative. He does, however, smooth out the awkward way the Greek had handled the Hebrew Hiphil (also reflected by the Old Latin), “They made a casting overboard.” He also shows a better understanding for the underlying Hebrew vocabulary than did the Septuagint (again, reflected in the Old Latin), substituting ‘god’ for ‘master,’ ‘inner part’ for ‘belly,’ ‘sleep with a very deep sleep’ for ‘sleeping and snoring.’

Now for an example where he shows a willingness to restructure the original for the sake of the target language:

Genesis 37:34

And Jacob tore his outer garment and he put sackcloth on his loins and he mourned for his son many days (word for word Hebrew).

Old Latin	Old Latin Translation	Vulgate	Vulgate Translation
Et conscidit iacob vestimenta sua	And Jacob tore his garments in pieces	scissisque vestibus	And when he had torn his clothes
et posuit saccum super lumbrum suum	and he put sackcloth on his loins	indutus est cilicio	he dressed in sackcloth,
et flebat filium suum	and he wept for his son	lugens filium	grieving for his son
diebus multis	for many days	multo tempore	for a long time

Jerome’s Latin removes the parataxis, actually sounding quite elegant in comparison with the Old Latin’s repeated ‘ands.’ He replaces the Old Latin’s rather wooden “he put sackcloth upon his loins” with a far more idiomatic expression. Finally, he recasts the time reference from ‘for many days’ into ‘for a long time’—again a more idiomatic Latin expression. In this section he is translating the Hebrew sense for sense and not word for word.

Probably the most lasting impact Jerome had on the world of translation was his insistence on translating *iuxta Hebraicem veritatem*—according the Hebrew verity. While such an approach may seem fairly obvious to us today, it was hardly so in late antiquity. The Septuagint translation had served as the Christian’s Old Testament for centuries. All the old Latin versions had used it as their base text. What is more, many influential churchmen had been insisting for quite some time that the Septuagint was—in itself—an inspired and even a prophetic work.⁴⁰ Early on in his translational career, Jerome himself might have agreed.

[But] his intensive biblical studies ...had finally convinced him that, however revolutionary it might seem and whatever hostility it might provoke, the only ultimately satisfying Bible for Christians was one which reproduced the Hebrew original.⁴¹

He had clearly come a long way from his original commission to harmonize and update the gospels! This conviction influenced his view on the Old Testament canon as well. Many centuries would have to pass, however, before his beliefs on that score could come to full flower in the Reformation.

A Learned Fellow: Martin Luther’s Approach to Translation

With genuine humility, Martin Luther said of his greatest linguistic achievement:

I have undertaken to translate the Bible into German. This was good for me; otherwise I might have died in the mistaken notion that I was a learned fellow.⁴²

Writers and historians run out of superlatives in their assessment of Luther’s translation. They celebrate his language, his creativity, and his vigorous style. They rightly

⁴⁰ Including Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Jerome’s influential younger contemporary, Augustine of Hippo.

⁴¹ J. N. D. Kelly, *Jerome: His Life, Writings, and Controversies*. Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, 159.

⁴² Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*. Concordia Publishing House, 1972, 105.

call him the father of the German language. We simply do not have time to delve into these matters, however pleasant it might be to do so.⁴³ Our concern remains the great debate between formal and functional equivalence. Where does the great reformer stand on the question?

Some have argued that Luther was a thoroughgoing literalist. They point to such passages as:

In translation I always hold to this rule that one should not do violence to the grammar. And whoever understands this [i.e., the grammar] correctly, that one will recognize that the letter gives [the correct sense], not the spirit.⁴⁴

Here I think it might be helpful to point out the senses in which Luther uses the words “grammar” and “the letter/literal,” which are almost synonymous in this passage. Regarding “grammar” we should not understand Luther to mean that he wants to preserve the Hebrew and Greek grammar in such a way that it is slavishly mirrored in his translation. There are simply too many places where Luther does *not* do this. I will give further evidence of this later. Furthermore, there are many times when Luther positively rails against what he considered to be “rabbinical” renderings into German by a wooden adherence to the Hebrew grammar.⁴⁵

Luther uses the word “literal’ (or: the letter) in two senses. The first is in opposition to the fourfold sense of Scripture known to medieval interpreters. Luther is saying, “The literal (or we might say: the historical grammatical) meaning⁴⁶ is the correct meaning of the text. Don’t look behind it, above it, or below it or engage in flights of allegoristic fantasy!” At other times he uses it when he has concluded, out of respect for doctrine, to preserve a more word for word translation of the source languages, saying, “We should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the [original] language where it does a better job than our German.”⁴⁷ Again, we will have opportunity to give examples of where he does this later. In this passage, Luther has the former sense in mind. Luther wanted at all times to stick to the plain meaning of the text. Allegoristic interpretations had no place in translating the Bible. In that sense Luther was a literalist.

I will attempt to distill Luther’s translational ‘method’ into three statements:

- A. He saw the message of Christ as central to the entire Bible, both Old and New Testaments.
- B. He scrupulously held to “the exact wording” translation of the original (even when this might “do violence to the German language”) when “everything turn[ed] on those very words” i.e. when a richer meaning or a doctrinal point were at stake.⁴⁸

⁴³ I could point you to the following books and essays, which represent just a sampling: Heinz Blum, *Martin Luther, Creative Translator*. Concordia Pub. House, 1965. M Reu, *Luther’s German Bible*. The Lutheran Book Concern, 1934. Arnold Koelpin, “Preparing a New Bible Translation in Luther’s Day,” essay delivered at the 1977 WELS Synod Convention. Ernst Wendland. “Martin Luther--Father of Confessional, Functional-Equivalence Bible Translation (Parts 1 & 2).” *Notes on Translation* 9, no. 1 and 2 (1995): 16–36; 47–60.

⁴⁴ As qtd in Deutchlander, Daniel. “Luther and Translating,” 5. Monroe, Michigan, 2012.

⁴⁵ See Koelpin, *op. cit.*, 7.

⁴⁶ i.e. the first of the fourfold senses.

⁴⁷ LW 35:261—cf Koelpin, *op. cit.*, 8-10.

⁴⁸ LW 35:194; 216.

- C. He was committed to communicating the Word of God to his German people in a common language version that was readily understandable to them. “Good translating means adapting the statement to the spirit of the [receptor] language.”⁴⁹

Christ at the Center of the Testaments

The implications for this in translation are obvious: *Qui non intelligit res non potest ex verbis sensum elicere*—Anyone who does not understand the subject matter will not be able to draw meaning from the words (Luther). Often it was Luther’s understanding of the subject matter—drawn from the wider and narrower contexts of Scripture—that liberated him from a merely word for word translation or from scrupulously adhering to the grammatical opinions and analysis of the rabbis.⁵⁰ Because he was so firm in his belief that Christ was the center of the inspired text of Scripture, he once said, “I hold that a false Christian or a sectarian spirit is unable to give a faithful translation.”⁵¹ Without these presuppositions of faith, one cannot understand—much less translate—the sacred texts.

When Words Matter

In a few key places, Luther would abandon his general practice of bringing the text closer to the reader and require the reader to come closer to the original text. He knew very well when a certain passage did not sound like good German because it was too literal. But if he felt that key theological terms were at stake or that a more idiomatic German rendering would keep the reader from acquiring a richer meaning implied by the Hebrew words, he would leave in place a more literal translation. He himself gives an excellent example of this in his *Defense of the Translation of the Psalms*:

On the other hand we have at times also translated quite literally—even though we could have rendered the meaning more clearly another way—because everything turns on these very words. For example, here in [Psalm 68] verse 18, “Thou hast ascended on high; thou hast led captivity captive,” it would have been good German to say, “Thou hast set the captives free.” But this is too weak, and does not convey the fine, rich meaning of the Hebrew, which says literally, “Thou hast led captivity captive.” This does not imply merely that Christ freed the captives, but also that he captured and led away the captivity itself, so that it never again could or would take us captive again; thus it is really an eternal redemption [Heb. 9:12]... On every hand St. Paul propagates such rich, glorious, and comforting doctrine (cf Ro 8:3; 1 Co 15:54; Ga 2:19; 2 Ti 1:10). Therefore out of respect for such doctrine, and for the comforting of our conscience, we should keep such words, accustom ourselves to them, and so give place to the Hebrew language where it does a better job than our German.⁵²

⁴⁹ As qtd. in Reu, *op. cit.* 267.

⁵⁰ As qtd. in Martin H. Franzmann. “Seven Theses on Reformation Hermeneutics.” Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (1969). www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=308. He often expressed himself on this subject. For more, see Reu, *op.cit.* 263ff. One more example: “Whoever wants to study Hebrew should first of all possess a proper New Testament and confidently commend himself to Christ as the sun, light, and guide” Reu, *op. cit.*, 265.

⁵¹ As qtd. in Plass, *op. cit.*, 105.

⁵² LW 35:216.

Ernst Wendland sums up the significance of this passage for translators , “The preceding...illustrates the importance of maintaining intertextual ‘resonance,’ that is, the accumulated significance of certain important expressions that recur in a number of places, especially in New Testament quotations of the Old.”⁵³

Communicating the Word of God

In terms of our great debate, however, there can be no question that Luther favored a sense for sense approach over a more literal one. I don’t wish to bore you with endless quotations in which he expresses himself quite clearly on the matter. To do so would not be at all difficult. I will content myself with only a few, ones which I feel best convey his understanding that translation involves far more than simply a matter of transposing one word for another, but a task in which the translator endeavors to communicate the meaning of God’s Word clearly to people in their own heart’s tongue and voice. Following this I will illustrate his method by considering one or two passages in which we see it on display.

First let Luther speak in his own inimitable way. As to the matter of seeking a common language for his version rather than speaking a form of Biblish, he wrote:

I wanted to speak German, not Latin or Greek, since it was German I had undertaken to speak in the translation...We do not have to inquire of the literal Latin, how we are to speak German, as these asses do. Rather we must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly. That way they will understand it and recognize that we are speaking German to them.⁵⁴

Concerning the subject of a scrupulous adherence to the words over the sense, he said:

But what is the point of needlessly adhering so scrupulously and stubbornly to words which one cannot understand anyway? Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew style. Rather he must see to it—once he understands the Hebrew author—that he concentrates on the sense of the text, asking himself, “Pray tell, what do the Germans say in such a situation?” Once he has the German words to serve the purpose, let him drop the Hebrew words and express the meaning freely in the best German he knows.⁵⁵

He recognizes that the individual words in a source text sometimes occupy a rather broad semantic domain, a breadth that cannot be reproduced consistently by a single word in the target text. He also knows that different languages have different word maps, and that the poverty of words in one language makes it impossible to reproduce the wealth of words in another:

It is impossible to give all the words just as they are in the Hebrew because each language has its own idioms. One word often has so many meanings (*latum*) that it is impossible to reproduce it adequately (with one word).⁵⁶

⁵³ Wendland, *op. cit.*, 28.

⁵⁴ LW 35:188-189.

⁵⁵ LW 35: 213-214.

⁵⁶ *Tischreden* 5521, as qtd. in Reu, 268.

The Hebrew language is so rich that no other can compare with it. It possesses many words for singing, praising, glorifying, honoring, rejoicing, sorrowing, etc., for which we have but one.⁵⁷

If [Job] were translated everywhere word for word...and not for the most part according to the sense, no one would understand it.⁵⁸

Finally, as to the matter of seeking meaning as the supreme goal governing all the rest, he declared:

Sententia et phrasis dominator super omnes leges et praecepta grammatica—meaning and expression hold sway over all laws and grammatical precepts.⁵⁹

Grammatica quidem necessaria est in declinando, conjugando, et construendo, sed in oratione sententiae et res considerandae, non grammatica, denn die grammatica soll nicht regieren super sententias—Grammar is indeed necessary for declining, conjugating, and figuring out the syntax, but in a longer discourse, the meanings and subject matter must be taken into account, not grammatical points, for grammatical points ought not to hold sway over the meaning.⁶⁰

These remarks illustrate Luther’s linguistic depth of insight. He seems years ahead of his time. I say this because many even today still locate meaning primarily at the level of individual words. In their minds, then, the failure to transpose a single word from the source text into the target text lays the translator open to the charge of falsifying the meaning. It is also felt by some that the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration requires that we retain—as much as possible—the word order and syntax of the original.⁶¹

Luther does not discount the words and syntax of the inspired text. But words and grammar serve the meaning, not vice versa. As a competent linguist he knows that words take on their exact meanings from their place in the context of a sentence, and sentences take on their meanings from their situation within the larger discourse. And all of it is governed by the basic subject matter under discussion.

How did these principles play out in Luther’s actual translational practice? I’ll leave out of the discussion Luther’s famous defense of his insertion of ‘*allein*’ into the German text at Romans 3:28.⁶² But it’s at least worth a mention since it provides an example of how Luther could also be non-literal in a crucial doctrinal passage. A better example might be the one Luther himself cites in his *Defense of the Translation of the Psalms*:

Again, Psalm 92[:14], says, “Even when they grow old, they will nevertheless bloom, and be fruitful and flourishing.” We know, of course, that [translated] word for word the text says this, “When their hair is gray they will still bloom and be fat and green.” But what does this mean? The psalm had been comparing the righteous to trees, to palm trees and cedars [verse 14], which have no “gray hair,” neither are they “fat” (by

⁵⁷ As qtd in Koelpin, *op. cit.*, 6.

⁵⁸ LW 35:252.

⁵⁹ *Tischreden* 4764, as qtd. in Reu, 269.

⁶⁰ *Tischreden* 3794, as qtd. in Reu, 269.

⁶¹ This attitude seems to be most prevalent among the conservative Evangelicals or Calvinists. [Young’s Literal Translation](#) has its advocates today. See [Young’s Preface to the Revised Edition](#).

⁶² I simply refer you to *On Translating: an Open Letter* LW 35:187ff.

which a German means an oily or greasy substance [schmaltz], and thinks of a hefty paunch). But the prophet here intends to say that the righteous are such trees, which bloom and are fruitful and flourishing even when they grow old. They must abide forever, for the word of God which they teach abides forever [I Pet. 1:25]. Psalm 1[:3] says, “His leaf shall not wither,” for the longer the righteous live, the more they gain both in the word and in life. But all other trees finally die away when they grow old, especially those factious spirits whom God has not planted, as Christ declares, “Every plant which my heavenly Father has not planted, must be rooted up” [Matt. 15:13].⁶³

There are a number of things here worth attending to closely. Luther is willing to find more general terms for the picturesque words “in their grey-hair” and “fat” since he believes these Hebrew idioms would clash with the image of trees in German parlance. The governing metaphor (righteous = trees), however, cannot be lost because of its intertextual ‘resonance’ (to use Dr. Wendland’s terminology) with similar images in the wider context of Scripture. So gray heads become a general reference to old age, and fat trees become trees that bloom.

Luther is rather more daring than even his explication suggests, though. His vigorous German switches the word order of the original, which reads:

Still do they bear fruit in gray-hair//Fat and flourishing will they be.

But in the German:

Und wenn sie gleich alt werden, werden sie dennoch blühen, fruchtbar und frisch sein.

And even though they grow old, they will nevertheless bloom and be fruitful and lively.

Note that Luther frontshifts the time reference, and, following good German idiom, balances the *wenn...gleich* of the first clause with the corresponding *dennoch* of the second: *even though...yet*. All this he does to reflect a single Hebrew word *’ōd*, placed as it is in emphatic position at the head of entire sentence. Note, too, the rhythmic way the sentence ends with a closing cadence

blühen, fruchtbar und frisch sein:

/ ˘ / ˘ ˘ / ˘
[long short, long short, short long short]

Luther is clearly aiming for the ear of the reader. His words sing. More on this later.

Another representative passage that well illustrates Luther’s desire to translate in an idiomatic way occurs in Mark 15:29-30. Here we are dealing with direct speech, an area that presents difficulties all its own in moving from one language to another.

Mark is depicting the reaction of the casual passers-by when they saw Jesus on the cross. He classifies their speech as ridicule and disrespect (έβλασφήμουν). Their “body English” as well demonstrates their contempt for Jesus (wagging their heads—κινούντες τὰς κεφαλὰς αὐτῶν). The Greek text reads:

Οὐὰ ὁ καταλύων τὸν ναὸν καὶ οἰκοδομῶν ἐν τρισὶν ἡμέραις, σῶσον σεαυτὸν καταβὰς ἀπὸ τοῦ σταυροῦ.

⁶³ LW 35:218-219.

[Greek literal translation] Aha,⁶⁴ you who destroy the temple and build in three days, save yourself [by] coming down from the cross!

[Luther] Pfui dich, wie fein zerbrichst du den Tempel und baust ihn in drei Tagen! Hilf dir nun selber und steig herab vom Kreuz!

Shame on you! Look how well you destroy the temple and build it in three days! Now help yourself and get down from the cross!

Masterfully Luther catches the sneering tone of the crowd. No major translation captures so clearly the contempt packed into the οὐα as does Luther's "Pfui dich."⁶⁵ Note the clear sarcasm in "wie fein." Notice, too, how he removes the rather awkward, "You who..." phrase and replaces it with main verbs in their own clause. Finally, observe the way he breaks up the longer sentence into two, yet still closely connecting them by allowing the idiomatic "nun" push off the time reference in the previous clause "drei Tagen." With such German, Luther puts his listeners themselves under the cross. It was no doubt a translational approach such as this that led Roland Bainton to exclaim:

Palestine has moved west. And this is what happened to a degree in Luther's rendering. Judea was transplanted to Saxony, and the road from Jericho to Jerusalem led through the Thuringian forest.⁶⁶

This brings up one final point with respect to Luther's desire to communicate the Word of God. In translating for the ear as well as the eye, he demonstrated a pastoral heart. He knew that the place where most of his people would encounter the translation most of the time was in public worship. The readability of his text was therefore a matter he kept continuously in mind:

While Luther was translating the Bible, he constantly read his sentences aloud, testing the accents and cadences, the vowels and consonants for their melodic flow. He did this because German was really a language (Sprache). It was meant to be spoken aloud by the tongue (lingua), not written; heard, not read; for a word has sound and tone. By Luther's own description, "The soul of the word lies in the voice." Thus Luther constructed his translation with a view to the public reading of the book. By means of sentence structure and meaningful punctuation, he makes the Bible a book to be heard.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ BDAG suggests the interjection denotes amazement, scornful wonder, or even joy.

⁶⁵ NIV's "So!" does a better job than ESV's "Aha!" but not so good as the HCSB's "Ha!" Yet all of them fail to capture it as well as Luther does.

⁶⁶ Roland H. Bainton, *Here I Stand: A Life of Martin Luther*. First ed. Signet, 1955, 256-267. This can, of course, be pushed too far—and in fact illustrates one of the limitations of a radical application of functional equivalence in translation. Translators must respect the historical nature of the Scriptures. An ancient document can be idiomatic in the form of its language, and yet reflect the fact that it comes from a world that, in geography and history, in custom and culture, is different from our own. In this respect, a translator ought not to aspire to produce a "translation that doesn't sound like a translation."

⁶⁷ Koelpin, *op.cit.*, 10-11. At times the Translation Evaluation of Committee of WELS has come under criticism for emphasizing readability as if it were the *sine qua non* of translation. In reply, we point people to our statements that speak of the vital need for translators to respect the *nature* and the *purpose* of God's inspired Word. This is of first importance. But while readability is not the *whole* thing, or even the *most important* thing, it is *a* thing to be considered when translating.

The effect all this had on Germany and, more specifically, on German Lutherans was, as we have said, profound. But it may be of particular interest for us in this discussion to read the concerns August Pieper expressed when the church of his day was confronted with the necessity of transitioning from German into English. This of course meant for them the adoption of the *King James Version* and its language in worship:

We might trace the deficiencies of the English Bible (and that applies also to the RV) back to two great points: (1) It is on the whole a too literal translation and therefore in spite of universal beauty of language, the characteristic expressions and phrases of the original text become un-English and thus difficult and unintelligible to the people...(2) It misses all too much the life, the freshness, and the power of the original Hebrew and Greek. This in large part is because of its all too wooden literalness...

Here we have a phenomenon unique to the English in the whole world, that they have one language in their Bible, in worship, and prayer, and another in daily, secular life; the one develops further and changes daily, while the other remains really stereotyped in the old viewpoint and consequently always moves farther from the people...If a people is not to come to such a dangerous fading away of religion, then religion dare not be isolated from other life. However the separation of the language of religion from the language of daily life contributes a good deal to this isolation.⁶⁸

The comment regarding the dangers of putting an artificial distance between the language of worship and the language of daily life is a point worth considering. Most of the high praise I have heard for the sonorous beauty of the King James I can readily agree with. I grew up on its cadences myself. But it still raises the question: did the Greek or the Hebrew sound as lofty of diction, as archaic of language, and as far removed from every day speech to the original listeners as does the language of the King James (and, it must be said, the language of many versions that wish to follow in the Great Tradition)?⁶⁹ Pieper's comments also might help others to understand why it is perhaps more in the DNA of WELS to prefer a more sense for sense version of Scripture.

Leave the Author in Peace—Friedrich Schleiermacher

One might think that after Jerome and Luther, the question of which was the better translation philosophy might have been settled, at least among heirs of the Reformation. This was far from true, however, for English speakers. Here, the King James or Authorized Version dominated the field like a colossus since the mid 1650's. Whether it is more literal in translational approach than Luther I leave for others to judge. It's clear enough where

⁶⁸ August Pieper "Our Transition into English" The quotation comes from a personal copy of Prof. John Jeske's translation of the entire German original "*Unser Übergang ins Englische.*" The article originally appeared in the *Theologische Quartalschrift* in the 1918-19 issue. It was reprinted in an abbreviated form in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 100, no. 2 (March 1, 2003), 85-106. The words do not appear in the abbreviated version.

⁶⁹ This is not to say that translations attempting to express the truth of the Bible in more contemporary idioms ought to forsake all concern for the literary beauties of the original which, in many books and sections of the Scripture, are considerable. Beauty of style is something to which a translator also must pay heed. Many translations in contemporary English achieve high standards of beauty and are hardly to be considered "colloquial" as some seem to think.

Prof. Pieper stood on that subject, and he was intimately familiar with both versions in a way few today can be. In any case, as a translation the KJV was essentially frozen in its diction for over 250 years. Inevitably, its language began to sound more distant from contemporary spoken and written English as usages continued to change.⁷⁰

Most new translations that were made during the great mission century (1800's) were missionary-driven, that is to say, they were projects in which the missionaries would learn the local language and then do the best job they could of translating the Bible for those they were trying to reach. The products of most of these efforts were uneven, and usually quite literal. This is not to discount the immensity of their achievement. In many cases they encountered peoples for whom there was no alphabet and no written language. But it must be said "Faithfulness to the source text was considered more important than respect for the genius of the target language."⁷¹

If there was any theory behind this approach, it is represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher. In our circles, he may not be held in generally high favor. But he was certainly an influential Christian writer and thinker of the times, and his views on translation are still held in high regard by some today.⁷² Permit me to summarize them by one key quotation from his famous lecture "On the Different Ways of Translation":

One cannot put forth as a rule for translation that it must think how the author himself would have written just the same thing in the translator's tongue...Indeed, what objection can be made if a translator says to his reader: Here I bring you the book as the man would have written it had he written it in German; and the reader responds: I am just as obliged to you as if you had brought me the picture of a man the way he would look if his mother had conceived him by a different father?⁷³

What Schleiermacher is dealing with is the problem of the cultural distortion or loss that inevitably occurs whenever thoughts expressed in the words of one language are transposed into another. His advice is, "Keep it at the barest of minimums, even at the expense of clear communication." He clearly sees that the translator has a choice:

⁷⁰ One may consult word lists such as can be found at <http://www.preservedwords.com/wordlist.htm> or http://www.kjvonly.org/robert/joyner_obsolete_words_1.html. In my own copy of the King James, I have a list of glosses for archaic words or words that have changed in meaning, including: kine, lunatic, liquor, meat, naughty, occupy, removed woman, etc. In the ESV—looking only within the gospel of John, I have noted archaic expressions such as "even" (for a parallel, synonymous expression, or an explanatory και—e.g. 1:27; 12:13), "behold" (1:29; 1:36; 1:47; 12:15; 16:32; 19:5; 19:14; 19:26; 19:27), "manifested" (2:11; 14:21; 14:22; 17:6), "marvel" (3:7; 4:27; 5:20; 5:28; 7:15; 7:21), "at hand" (2:13; 6:4; 7:2; 11:55; 19:42), "house of trade" (2:16), "depart out of this world" (13:1), "morsel of bread" (13:26). My point in all this is not to say that archaisms cannot enhance a version's beauty in some people's eyes. Those who have been raised on the RSV or KJV likely find much beauty there.

⁷¹ Paul Ellingworth, "From Martin Luther to the English Revised Version" in *History Of Bible Translation*, Phil Noss, ed. Amer Bible Society, 2007, 134.

⁷² Notably translation theorists like Lawrence Venuti. For a brief study of how his views contrast with Nida's, see: Wenfen Yang, "Brief Study on Domestication and Foreignization in Translation." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, Vol. 1, no. 1 (January 2010), 77–80. More on Venuti later.

⁷³Freidrich Schleiermacher "On the Different Methods of Translation" Susan Bernofsky, trans; in *The Translation Studies Reader*, Lawrence Venuti, ed., 3rd ed. Routledge, 2012, 59.

Either [he] leaves the author in peace as much as possible and moves the reader towards him; or he leaves the reader in peace as much as possible and moves the writer towards him. These two paths are...very different from one another.⁷⁴

“Leave the author in peace!” would be his counsel. That his point is a valid one can be seen when one examines paraphrases of the Scripture which so distort the cultural original that one could almost believe that that it was a Good Yankee travelling from Houston to Galveston, rather than a Samaritan on his way to Jericho from Jerusalem. The gospel is not an ahistorical philosophy, but our God working to save in the warp and woof of specific human times and days.

At the same time, however, critics of more functionally equivalent translations need to bear in mind that the mere act of taking something once said in Hebrew and putting it into English distorts the source text’s culture—even if one is following a word for word approach. A measure of cultural loss and/or distortion is an inevitable by-product of the work of translation. The question is: what losses are acceptable, and what measure of distortion can we tolerate? Here, I believe, some will draw the line in one place and others in another. I doubt very much whether Luther and Schleiermacher would have drawn the line in the same place. With Eugene Nida, the ‘dynamic’ shifts again.

Father of Functional Equivalence—Eugene Nida

To call Eugene Nida merely the modern champion of sense for sense translation is to condemn him with far too faint praise. His contributions to modern translation theory are legion. More than anyone else in the modern era, Nida has stimulated the broad study and discussion of translation we see all around us. Statham’s assessment is no exaggeration:

In terms of consolidating, mediating, and explicating along the way many of the most relevant and helpful insights of the plethora of intellectual disciplines which bear on Bible translation, Nida’s contribution in this area is without peer—especially in the area of understanding translation as a communicative event. In terms of original contribution, it cannot be gainsaid that Nida was *the* pioneer of 20th century progress in meaning-based translation.⁷⁵

It must be borne in mind that Nida began his life’s work in a context where the King James Version and other essentially literal translations still dominated, not only in the English-speaking world but also on mission fields (see above). The limitations of these versions were becoming more and more apparent. His initial motive, therefore, was a missiological one, involving as it did the question, “How can we communicate God’s enduring truth to people in a language that they can understand?” With the following bulleted points, Mojola and Wendland summarize Nida’s new approach in his *Theory and Practice of Translation* (TAPOT):

- Each language has its own genius.
- To communicate effectively one must respect the genius of each language.

⁷⁴ Schleiermacher, *ibid.*, 49.

⁷⁵ Nigel Statham, “Nida and ‘Functional Equivalence.’” *The Bible Translator* vol. 56, no. 1 (January 2005), 39.

- Anything that can be said in one language can be said in another, unless the form is an essential element of the message.
- To preserve the content of the message, the form must be changed.
- The languages of the Bible are subject to the same limitations as any other natural language.
- The writers of the biblical books expected to be understood.
- The translator must attempt to reproduce the meaning of a passage as understood by the writer.⁷⁶

One can see Nida's desire to preserve for target readers—as far as possible—the communicative power that the source text possessed for its original readers. To do this the forms of the original could be sacrificed for naturalness of language as perceived by the target readers. Note that the overarching value is to preserve the meaning intended by the original author. Bearing this in mind helps us better understand what Nida meant in what became his most misunderstood statement. In writing about the goal of a translation which aimed for 'dynamic equivalence,' he said:

[In such a translation] the message of the original text has been transported into the receptor language in such a way that the RESPONSE of the RECEPTOR is essentially that of the original receptors. Frequently, the form of the original text is changed; but...the message is preserved and the translation is faithful.⁷⁷

Some, like Charles Kraft, argued from this that translations could aim for an equivalence of effect, that is, to evoke the same behavioral responses from their target readers that had been achieved by the original authors with their readers. Thus Kraft advocated 'transculturations' under certain circumstances. These were works in which "the impression might be given that Jesus walked the streets of Berkeley or London or Nairobi."⁷⁸ As many pointed out, such an approach, "obliterated the very biblical cultures which Nida's ideas on translation were designed to illuminate for contemporary hearers and readers."⁷⁹

In their second major work on translation, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation* (FOLTA), Tabor and Nida tried to put an end to this type of misapplication of their ideas. They renamed their approach 'functional equivalence,' admitting, "the expression 'dynamic equivalence' has...led to some confusion...[having] been understood merely in terms of something which has impact and appeal."⁸⁰ By contrast, in seeking 'functional equivalence,' "The translator must seek to employ a functionally equivalent set of forms which in so far as possible will *match the meaning of the original source-language text* (emphasis mine)."⁸¹

⁷⁶ Aloo Osotsi Mojola and Ernst Wendland, "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies," in Timothy Wilt, ed. *Bible Translation: Frames of Reference*. St Jerome Pub, 2002, 2.

⁷⁷ Nida and Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, 200.

⁷⁸ As qtd in Carson, "The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation" Scorgie, Strauss, and Voth, ed., in *The Challenge of Bible Translation: Communicating God's Word to the World*. Zondervan, 2003, 94-95.

⁷⁹ Statham, *op. cit.*, 38.

⁸⁰ Nida and Tabor, *From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation* (FOLTA), 1st ed. Thomas Nelson Inc, 1986, viii.

⁸¹ Nida, *ibid.*, 25.

The reader will observe in that statement a shift in emphasis from the response of the receptor to functionally equivalent forms of language, specifically, to language that clearly conveys and preserves the meaning of the original text. In the same work, Taber and Nida, reflecting more recent linguistic studies, identified a wider variety of language functions than had been the case in TAPOT.⁸² Finally the authors spoke about the importance of considering the larger units of discourse in translation. They recognized that meaning lay beyond the mere word, phrase, and sentence levels, levels which had appeared to receive the lion's share of the discussion in TAPOT.⁸³

'Resist Domestication; 'Preserve Otherness'—Vanuti and Van Leeuwen

In 1985, D.A. Carson wrote about "The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence." In the article, he pointed out some of the practical and theological problems involved with an overzealous application of Nida's principles. Later, he felt compelled to update and expand the essay, adding to his title the phrase, "And Other Limits, Too."⁸⁴ He was moved to do this because of what he saw as some of the practical and theological problems involved with what he termed, "the rise of linguistic conservatism."⁸⁵ This movement might be generally understood as a reaction to Nida and as a return to putting greater emphasis on preserving the forms of the original text in one's translation. By now we should be getting pretty accustomed to riding this see-saw.

But political labels like 'conservative' and 'radical' do not always translate well into a religious context. This is most certainly true in this case. I found it bewildering to read men with a high view of the Holy Scriptures like Van Leeuwen making the case for a more formally equivalent approach alongside Vanuti, someone I can only consider to be a thoroughgoing postmodernist.

Like most postmodernists, Lawrence Vanuti locates meaning in individual cultures and resists as naïve Nida's notions of being able to transfer meaning from one culture into another. "Readers," a good postmodern would say, "have no access to the pure original, or to the pure thought of the original author. They interpret texts through the lens of language, their experience, belief system, circumstances, interests, needs, and agendas."⁸⁶ In Venuti's own words:

Meaning is a plural and contingent relation, not an unchanging unified essence, and therefore a translation cannot be judged according to mathematics-based concepts of semantic equivalence or one to one correspondence...Canons of accuracy in translation, notions of 'fidelity' and 'freedom' are historically determined categories...the viability of a translation is established by its relationship to the cultural and social conditions under which it is produced and read.⁸⁷

⁸² TAPOT had identified informative, expressive, and imperative as the primary functions of language. FOLTA expanded this list to eight: expressive, cognitive, interpersonal, informative, imperative, performative, and aesthetic.

⁸³ Mojola and Wendland, *op.cit*, 5. See FOLTA, chapters 5 & 6.

⁸⁴ Carson, *op. cit.*, 65.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸⁶ Mojola and Wendland, *op.cit*, 8.

⁸⁷ As qtd. in Mojola and Wendland, *op. cit.*, 8.

While we cannot argue with the fact that our own presuppositions and culture have a great impact on how we read and translate texts, to make meaning as historically and culturally situated as this is to despair of all hope for objective truth. In any case, Venuti decries the effort to produce fluent translations that read naturally in the target language. These convey a mere 'illusion of transparency' and in fact 'domesticate' the original so much that one can no longer detect the utter foreignness of it all. Worse, it is an attempt to make the target text submit to the ideology of Anglo American culture in a translational act of 'ethnocentric violence.' Far better, in his view, to have 'foreignizing' translations in which one can truly experience the otherness of the biblical culture.

Raymond C. Van Leeuwen is clearly coming from a different place altogether. His desire is to preserve the truth of the original. Even so it is striking to see how he adopts and employs much of Venuti's vocabulary in arguing his case:

Functional-equivalence translations often change the language, images, and metaphors of Scripture to make understanding easier. But for serious study readers need a translation that is more transparent to the 'otherness' of Scripture. We need a translation that allows the Bible to say what it says, even if it seems strange and odd to readers at first glance. If God is 'other' than we are, we should be willing to work at the 'otherness' of the Bible...The purpose of the Bible is not to make Jesus like us, but to make us like Christ...We need translations for people who are eager and willing to make the effort to overcome the difficulty of reading a book that is in fact foreign to us...The danger of FE translations is that they shape the Bible too much to fit our world and our expectations. There is a danger that the Bible gets silenced because we have tamed and domesticated it.⁸⁸

Let's leave aside for the minute that Van Leeuwen confuses the foreignness of the biblical language with the 'otherness' of God.⁸⁹ There is validity in much of what he says. Of course one should not willfully distort the historical and cultural realities of the original in an effort to make it more palatable for the modern world. The whole matter of cultural distortion is an important, and indeed an inescapable discussion (see above on p. 22).

But does it follow that a more functionally equivalent translation—in an effort to communicate clearly—must give the impression that it does not speak of far off historical events in far distant cultures? Further, does a meaning based translation always become—for that very reason—more tamed and domesticated to our way of thinking rather than God's? Here I have in mind Mark Twain's famous statement, "It ain't those parts of the Bible that I can't understand that bother me, it is the parts that I do understand."

The greatest difficulty with Van Leeuwen's approach, however, remains the fact that he makes use of theological axioms to justify (or reprove) a particular approach to translation. Once a person does this, the discussion has ceased to revolve around what is the best way to translate and shifted to the question of who is or is not orthodox.

The Strengths and Weaknesses of Each Approach

It is the thesis of this writer that both formal correspondence (FC) and functional equivalence (FE) have their place in Bible translation. I hope it is clear by now that when

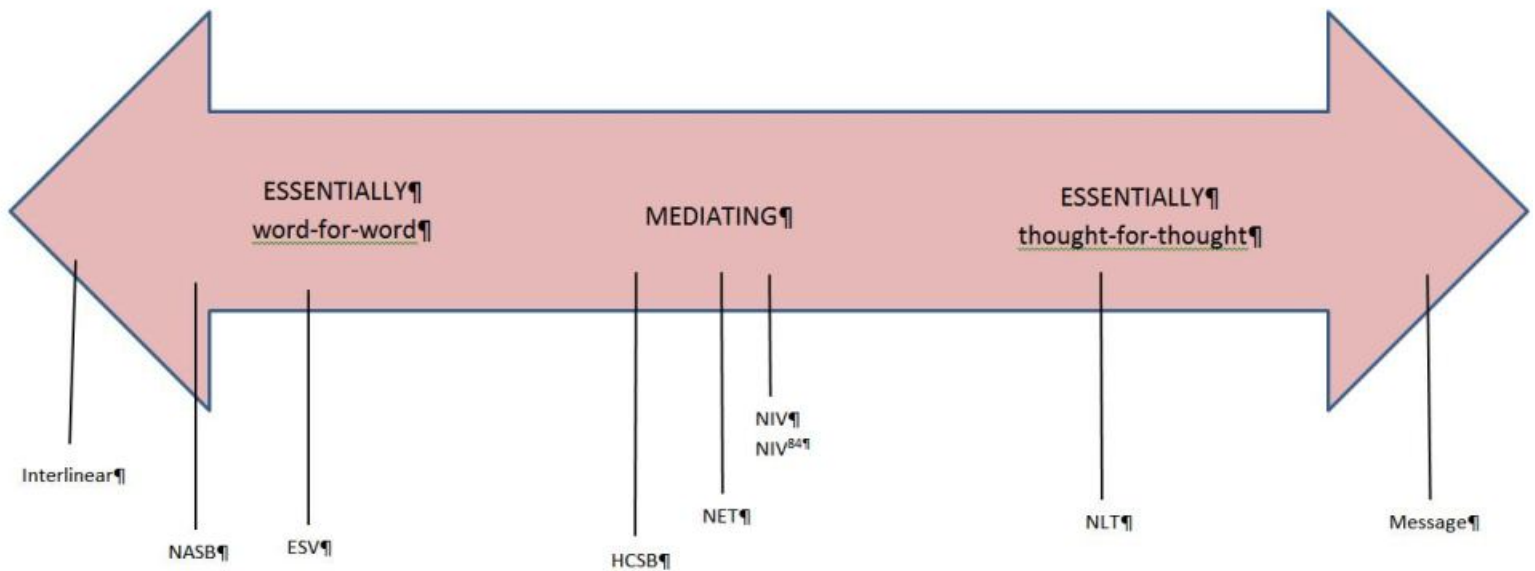
⁸⁸ As qtd in Carson, *op. cit.*, 67-68.

⁸⁹ Carson points this out, *ibid.*

we engage in debating the relative merits of each, we are indeed taking part in a discussion that has stretched over the millennia with no easy resolution in sight. In my view, it is better to talk about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach rather than hold up either as the only right way to do things.

For my examples of the weaknesses of FC, I am going to be using the ESV. For those of FE, the NIV will be used. Please remember, the ESV is no more a 'pure type' of FC than the NIV is of FE. Both combine features of each approach in varying degrees. But since the NIV is a more functionally equivalent translation, it serves to illustrate that approach, just as the ESV serves to illustrate formal correspondence since it occupies a position closer to that end of the spectrum. One more caveat: in none of the examples I cite do I wish to be understood as saying that the translations mentioned are unusable.

The chart below serves as a kind of rough estimate of where the various translations are located between the poles of FC and FE:



General Discussion of the Advantages and Limits of Formal Correspondence

The great strength of a formally equivalent translation is the sense of foreignness that it conveys to the average reader. One has the distinct impression of being immersed in a world that is different from our own and in a language that we do not normally speak. Faithfulness to the source culture is, as we have mentioned, an important consideration when translating the Bible. In addition, when there is a greater effort expended in seeking a word for word correspondence, concordance and allusions become easier to detect, both within the thread of a discourse and between one section of Scripture and another. What is more, to the sophisticated lay reader and the biblical scholar, the effort to preserve in translation the constructions of the original will result in a greater transparency to the Hebrew/Greek idioms and expressions that lie beneath the English text.

One cannot lightly dismiss, either, the social context in which a particular translation appears. Written English has a long history and within that history, there is a received tradition of how a Bible translation is supposed to sound. This is not true of every language. Generally speaking, the Authorized Version is a more word for word translation than many of its modern successors. Like Shakespeare, the KJV has had a tremendous impact on both written and spoken English during the years when its reign was undisputed. People have come to perceive great literary beauty in its rhythms, cadences, and forms of speech. To those who have been raised in that tradition, a functionally equivalent translation may well sound as if one is trivializing God and dumbing down Christianity—even if the modern English version seeks to maintain high standards of literary beauty.⁹⁰

Finally, to those who equate the idea of literalness with faithfulness, such a translation will recommend itself as being more faithful, and therefore superior to a functionally equivalent translation where words are seemingly ‘changed’ or ‘added’ or ‘subtracted.’ But it is right here—the equation of literalness with accuracy and faithfulness—where we must begin to touch on one of the greatest weaknesses displayed by those who argue for formal correspondence. I do not have in mind the translational approach as such, but what I view as the overheated remarks I read people making in ‘selling’ it. Some have said:

Not only does a translation that reproduces the very words of the original text have logic on its side (translation of ideas rather than words being an illogical notion); it is also the only type of translation that respects and obeys other important principles regarding the Bible. Since I have already discussed these further principles at length in earlier chapters, I will only list them here: Translating the words of the original takes seriously the doctrines of verbal inspiration and plenary inspiration, whereas “thought for thought” translators, no matter how reverential they are toward the Bible, operate as though they do not believe that the very words themselves are inspired by God and therefore something to be retained in translation.⁹¹

This is such a misleading statement that one hardly knows where to begin, by addressing its faulty linguistics or bad theology. Linguistically, such a statement seems to assume that meaning resides at the level of words, rather than at the phrase, sentence, and paragraph levels (and even higher, when one takes in the whole scriptural context). In short, it ignores what Lutherans have known ever since Luther! Furthermore, one might ask, just how many of the ‘very words themselves’ *are* retained in translation? The answer is, zero!

Of course the individual inspired words are important, but their meanings become clear only as they occur in specific contexts and with other words. The meaning of the Hebrew word *ruah* is really uncertain, taken by itself. It can mean spirit, wind, or breath. When used with other words—such as in ‘Holy Spirit’—its meaning becomes clear. Further, the insistence on ‘reproduc[ing] the very words of the original text’ must ultimately lead to the

⁹⁰ I am reminded in this connection of a conversation I had with my father many years ago when I was starting out in pastoral ministry. Dad always used the prayer language of the KJV, replete with ‘thee’s’ and ‘thou’s’ and archaic verbal forms. To him, that was the language of his heart in speaking to God. I was unable to reproduce it, and he told me once that it seemed to him—even though he knew better—that I was disrespecting God in the language that I used.

⁹¹ Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*. Crossway, 2002, 217-218.

conclusion that the books of the Bible are essentially untranslatable, since English is not Hebrew or Greek.

Similarly in his theology Ryken has confused the outer form (the words) with the inner essence (the meaning). This leads him to malign the actions, if not the motives of those who, as Luther advised, “drop the Hebrew words and express the meaning freely in the best German [or Dutch, or English] he knows.” People who do this, Ryken suggests, don’t take seriously the doctrine of verbal plenary inspiration. This accusation is simply absurd on the face of it.

The most heated debate of course revolves around the use of gender in translation, specifically, how to translate masculine words and pronouns from Hebrew and Greek into English—especially the generic masculine. There are those who believe that something essential is lost if these words are rendered with more gender inclusive terms. Hence they will be strong advocates for a formal correspondence approach in translating them. Consider what Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem have to say about the generic ‘he’:

The issue is whether a Bible translation systematically excludes male components of meaning that are there in the original text...Because the Bible is the very Word of God and because it conveys meaning that is amazingly rich, complex, and multilayered, in the context of doing Bible translation we ought to convey in the translation *as much of the meaning of the original as we can*. Therefore, with respect to changing generic “he” to some other form of expression, we ought not to tolerate these losses of meaning as long as a way exists of avoiding the losses. And of course a way does exist—namely, continuing to use the generic “he.”⁹²

Anything less, they consider to be ‘distortions,’⁹³ seeking to make Scripture palatable to modern culture,⁹⁴ and sliding down the slippery slope of a complete cave-in to a feminist ideology.⁹⁵ Their chief concern is a laudable one. They wish to preserve the doctrine of male headship and they believe that preserving the ‘nuance’ of maleness in words like ‘*adam*’ as well as in generic masculines is vital for preserving the truth of God’s Word. While I share their concern for preserving the doctrine of male headship, I don’t think that making arguments of a dubious linguistic and theological nature is a good way to get there.

Let us focus on their main thesis: that there is an intrinsic sense of maleness in every occurrence of a generic masculine ‘he’ or in a generic use of male words like ‘*adam*,’*ish*, *anēr*, *adelphoi*.’ To prove this, one would have to prove that the Hebrew and Greek readers ‘heard’ generics this way, as expressive of their belief in male headship. This is difficult to do. In fact, there is at least some evidence to suggest that they did *not* ‘hear’ generics this way. For example Romans 4 (discussed above) illustrates the difficulty. In addition to using the word *anēr* (man) in parallel to *anthrōpos* (person), Paul seems untroubled by the apparent loss of vital ‘nuances’ of meaning in shifting from the singular to the generic

⁹² Vern S. Poythress, and Wayne A. Grudem. *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words*. Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000, 116-117.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 186-187. Yes I know, I mixed a metaphor. It seemed justifiable in this case.

plural as he does. How can one account exegetically for such mixing and matching if indeed the male component of meaning were everywhere felt to be present?⁹⁶

Many have also pointed out that the insistence upon a male component of meaning in every instance of ‘*adam, ish, anēr, adelphoi,*’ etc. demonstrates a number of linguistic fallacies, namely, that meaning lies at the level of individual words, that words have basic, irreducible meanings,⁹⁷ and that what a word means in one place it must mean in every place. This latter notion James Barr identified long ago as the linguistic fallacy of “illegitimate totality transfer.”⁹⁸ Now no one would dispute that a male component of meaning is undoubtedly ‘there’ in many places where these words are used. But the issue is whether or not that component of meaning is found in every place. On this is built the further assertion that a failure to translate a generic masculine in the source text with a generic masculine in the target text constitutes a distortion, and results in an unacceptable loss of the original’s meaning.

Here’s where an argument from other languages comes in. There are some languages where it is impossible to render a generic masculine with another generic masculine because the target language simply does not have any form that corresponds. One may object⁹⁹ that we are talking about English translations here and should confine our discussions to what the resources of the English language may do. But at issue is not what is possible in English, but *what must be preserved* in transferring meaning from one language to another. If the male ‘nuance’ is seen as a necessary one, the loss of which constitutes an intolerable distortion of the Word of God, then the argument has gone well beyond English usage or a desire to preserve the source text’s culture. Such sweeping statements must be true not only of English but of translation into other languages as well.

So I may say, “A Tonga translation must necessarily involve unacceptable distortions, given the fact that it does not differentiate gender in the third person singular the way Greek or English does.”¹⁰⁰ I cannot, therefore, recommend it as a faithful and accurate

⁹⁶ A more in depth discussion of this matter can be found in Kenneth Cherney, “Gender-Neutral Language, with Special Reference to NIV 2011.” Translation Evaluation Committee, n.d.

<http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/gender-neutral%20NIV%202011%20article%20edited.pdf>, 16ff.

⁹⁷ What irreducible meaning do you find in the word ‘board’ in this sentence: the governing *board* boarded up the ship before crossing the *board* to go on *board* where they received free room and *board*? Adapted from Carson, *op. cit.*, 75.

⁹⁸ For more discussion of this point, see Carson, *op. cit.*, 75ff, as well as Kenneth Cherney *op. cit.*, 11ff.

⁹⁹ As Poythress and Grudem do: *op. cit.*, 201-202.

¹⁰⁰ A even more striking example can be found in the following illustration from my own experience:

When my first child was born in Zambia, I happily used my 3rd grade Tonga to tell all my friends:

“Batumbu bwangu bakazhalwa mwana!—My wife has given birth to a child!”

They replied, “Mwananzi—musimbi, na musankwa?”—What sort of child, boy or girl?”

“Musimbi!”—Girl!

“Ohhh....sorree!”—Oh, sorry!

My point is not to illustrate the apparent sexism of the worldview, but to show that the only word that Tonga has for ‘child’ is ‘mwana.’ They really have no word for ‘son’ or ‘daughter.’ The only way you can say ‘son’ in Tonga is to say, ‘Mwana musankwa—a child, male one.’ The third person pronoun—both singular and plural—is likewise sexless. Only the context can reveal if the referent is naturally male or female.

If then the “maleness” component of meaning in words like “son” contain something vital that needs to be carried over, then the translator is in a world of hurt. He can say, for example:

“Bana basankwa ba Israeli”—the male children of Israel. But this is full of problems besides the fact that it is cumbersome. It is a case of overtranslation that conveys something not there in the original. While it

translation!” But if someone is unwilling to go this far, then perhaps one should also hesitate before slapping a similar label onto an English translation.

The fact is, every modern translation (ESV, NIV, HCSB) I know of makes at least some use of gender neutral or gender inclusive language.¹⁰¹ This alone would suggest that the issue is one of degree more than principle. They do not all draw the lines in the same places. Some do it more broadly; others less so. But when people representing one translation make the charge that where other translators draw the line in the matter of generic masculines is unacceptable, then the argument has veered into the ditch of name calling. Acceptable and non-acceptable categories of gender inclusivity appear to be arbitrary. “*Sic volo, sic iubeo; sit pro ratione voluntas!*—don’t ask me for reasons, just do what I say!”

Finally there is a bit of sketchy hermeneutics going on here. Lutheran theology is a theology of certainty. We do not major in minors. We know what we know. We know what we don’t know. And we know the difference between the two. Our doctrinal teachings rest on clear Scripture passages or *sedes doctrinae*.¹⁰² One does not draw doctrine from inferences about the theological significance of grammatical features or by treating words as if they were overarching or general concepts. To do so is to introduce a hermeneutic of speculation into the church.

In all this I do not mean to suggest that there is anything wrong with a formally equivalent translation seeking to preserve in English those features of the source text they prefer—including the masculine generics. Translation is all about making such choices. One should realize, however, that in choosing one option, others often have to be let go. A formally equivalent translation that communicates easily and well to one audience may not do so well in a different circumstance. Here I’m thinking of areas of the country where the generic ‘man’ is generally heard as a term that excludes women. This is simply one of the limits of the formally equivalent approach.

There are other limits as well, chief among which are readability and ease of understanding. Even strong proponents of formal equivalence implicitly admit the truth of this,¹⁰³ although there are some who might still contest it. Consider, for example, the

preserves the male notion, it makes it impossible to understand the expression as referring to anyone other than the men. Women are definitely not included. Probably in this case the preferred translation would be “bantu ba Israeli”—people of Israel, since “bana” will likely raise the question, “While the children were making bricks, what were the adults doing?”

Now for another one: how do you suppose the Tonga translators handled, “The Son of God,” or “The Son of Man”? Only one way possible, I’m afraid: Mwana a Leza; Mwana a Muntu—the Child of God; Child of a Person. The translator must hope, in this case, that the context will make it clear enough that an adult is being referred to, as well as a male, since the word simply means ‘child.’ But again, to specify Mwana musankwa a Leza; or Mwana musankwa a Muntu is not only unnatural, but it also introduces ideas foreign to the thought in the original.

Translation= choices, choices. And not always easy ones at that!

¹⁰¹ Although Poythress and Grudem try to define their way out of the problem, calling some use of gender inclusive terms “permissible” and others “unacceptable”—see *op.cit.*, chapter 5.

¹⁰² One of the first tasks the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee worked on was to carry out a systematic review of the key *sedes doctrinae* in the NIV 2011. We were looking for problems that would make the truth of God unclear. We found the NIV in this respect acceptable.

¹⁰³ For example, Van Leeuwen who says (as noted above), “We need translations for people who are eager and willing to **make the effort to overcome the difficulty of reading a book that is in fact foreign to us**” (emphasis mine).

opening of Ephesians. Paul's thanksgiving—verses 3-10—is essentially one long sentence. While somewhat unusual even for Paul, it is not outside the realm of Greek periodic style. The ESV breaks up the paragraph up into only three fairly long English sentences. The HCSB uses four and the NIV 2011 five. The ESV is closer to the Greek in that it preserves a more periodic style. The NIV is further away from the Greek in that it breaks the message up into shorter sentences. But I think the fair minded person would agree that the average English reader would find shorter sentences easier to comprehend.

The ESV translators, in following their 'essentially literal' approach, often preserve Hebrew or Greek idioms which take quite a bit of effort for English speakers to understand. For example:

Genesis 27:39: Away from the fatness of the earth shall your dwelling be.

Joshua 10:21: Not a man moved his tongue against any of the people of Israel.

Amos 4:6: I gave you cleanness of teeth in all your cities and lack of bread in all your places.

Psalms 69:23: Make their loins tremble continually.

Mark 1:2: Behold I send my messenger before your face.

John 9:27: Give glory to God. We know that this man is a sinner.

Again one may fairly argue that a greater transparency to the original has been achieved. But the cost has been ease of understanding. I might also add that, in some cases, the cost may be even higher. The reader may be left with no understanding or even the wrong understanding. In John 9:27, the idiom, "Give glory to God" is a formula by which the Jewish leaders are putting the man born blind under oath. It is very likely, however, that the average reader would understand the phrase as the Jews urging the man to praise God for his healing!

This is of course beside the point if you are making a translation for people who are eager to overcome the difficulty of reading a foreign sounding book. If this is your goal, then in every case cited above you would find no cause for complaint. But this immediately raises the question, how easily understood should the Bible be? It seems likely that some passages in Job would have posed problems for many Israelites and Paul's letters, as we know, contain some things that are hard to understand. Still one wonders, did the expressions cited above sound so difficult to the original audience? Even more broadly, does God in general intend for his Word to sound dark and obscure? It is here where the proponents of functional equivalence have a legitimate point to make.

General Discussion of the Advantages and Limits of Functional Equivalence

Before we look at the major strengths and weaknesses of FE, I would like to make one observation. On the whole, the proponents of FE seem more open to self-criticism than the proponents of FC. One gets the impression in reading the formal correspondence literature that there is something a little bit sinister going on in the realm of FE, while all is bright and sunny in the land of FC. Yet when FE writers speak of Nida and his legacy, they themselves recognize and seek to overcome a number of matters they identify as weaknesses.

Mark Strauss summarizes many of those problem areas in making the following prescriptions:

(1) Translators seeking functional equivalence should not depart from the meaning of the text in its original cultural and historical context in the pursuit of contemporary relevance. While eliminating *linguistic* distance....they should retain *historical* distance.¹⁰⁴ (2) Translators should seek to retain the literary style and sophistication of the biblical authors, rather than leveling the text to a single remedial style.¹⁰⁵ (3) They should seek inasmuch as possible to retain verbal and literary allusions when these allusions were important to the meaning of the text.¹⁰⁶ (4) They should retain ambiguity if and when the original author was intentionally ambiguous.¹⁰⁷ (5) They should reproduce metaphors and metaphorical idioms in cases where those metaphors were 'live'—that is, where they retained their conceptual imagery for the original readers.^{108 109}

Mojola and Wendland, writers with sympathy towards a functionally equivalent approach, would add to the list Nida's early focus on linguistics at the sentence level and below, his inadequate linguistic model for text analysis (the so-called conduit metaphor), and indeed the whole idea of seeing formal correspondence and functional equivalence as a rigid dichotomy. Such an attitude, they feel, does not properly reflect the complexities of language and translation.¹¹⁰

Carson discusses a propensity among some of FE's practitioners to be excessive in their desire to smooth out a more difficult original in the interests of comprehensibility. In his opinion, there are also times when an FE approach downplays the need for translators to have a strong grasp of the original's grammar and syntax. This tendency is especially dangerous when a translation project puts too much confidence in those who are merely good stylists in the receptor language. When this happens, the ideal of communicative fluency can trump the actual message that needs to be communicated. Finally Carson speaks a word of caution against the thought that a translation should be able to do it all, as if it went out into a world in which dedicated pastors and evangelists were non-existent.¹¹¹

These are all legitimate criticisms and indicate areas where FE needs to recognize its limitations. Nevertheless FE's greatest strength lies in the fact that it seeks above all to communicate. Nida believed that the biblical writers meant to be understood. I agree with this thesis. The greatest weakness for formal correspondence is found in exactly the same place where functional equivalence shows its greatest strength. It produces translations

¹⁰⁴ This one of course is aimed at Charles Kraft and those like him who at times translated text as if he were engaged in *pesher* exegesis.

¹⁰⁵ This 'fault' might be seen in *Today's English Version*, a common language translation; also, it must be said, in Beck's *AAT* (An American Translation). This was long noted by Nida himself as a problem area. For this reason, Ernst Wendland advocates a LiFE (literary functional equivalence) approach, as detailed in "A Literary Approach to Biblical Text Analysis and Translation" in Wilt, *op. cit.*, 179-230.

¹⁰⁶ To the extent the NIV translators always succeeded in this respect, we will examine below.

¹⁰⁷ I believe he sets the bar too high here. It is very difficult to prove sometimes when the author intended to be ambiguous. But there are quite a few times when, due to our own deficiencies in understanding, an author simply is ambiguous, that is, he could be interpreted in different ways.

¹⁰⁸ This too often comes down to a matter of judgment. Would we agree that the Hebraistic "walk" for the walk of life is always a dead metaphor and that it can therefore be rendered 'live' as does the NIV?

¹⁰⁹ Mark Strauss, "Form, Function, and the 'Literal Meaning' Fallacy in English Bible Translation," *The Bible Translator* Vol. 56, no. 3 (July 2005), 156-157.

¹¹⁰ For an expansion on these points, read Mojola and Wendland, *op. cit.*, 5-10.

¹¹¹ For more, see Carson, *op. cit.*, 93-105.

which are highly readable and which, since they are written in language that is natural and current, can be understood without needless difficulty. In a recent survey of over 100 WELS pastors, NIV11—viewed section by section—was chosen as best in its overall English style by more than 90% of the participants—this in a side by side comparison with the ESV and the HCSB.¹¹²

Yet perhaps somewhat paradoxically, decisions made in the interest of good communication can also be the very same ones that are most easily criticized. What I mean is, at times the desire to communicate becomes a weakness, especially in those places where a genuine ambiguity has been resolved unnecessarily, or where a rendering prevents a reader from seeing other options in the text, or where you feel the translator just plain got it wrong.¹¹³ Just as one can rightly point out the weaknesses of the ESV in handling idioms or in preserving archaic or unEnglish ways of speaking, so I believe there are many places in the NIV where one can point to an overzealous ‘smoothing out’ of the original.

Naturally the NIV’s gender sensitive approach comes to mind here. Let me stipulate at the outset that I have no quarrel with the NIV’s using a gender inclusive term 1) when the original intent is to use a term that would have been understood by the original audience to include both men and women and 2) when the English term that formally corresponds to it (man, he, etc.) is widely understood by many today to be exclusive (man, *not* woman). Obviously this includes generic masculines, and even the word ‘brother,’ for example, as it is used in the opening verses of Romans. Not only do I have no quarrel with this approach, I believe it is the right way to go in many places, provided one wishes to follow a more functionally equivalent approach. Frankly, I find much of the criticism of the NIV on this score to be overwrought.

That being said, I must also confess that there are times when I feel that gender inclusive terminology has become somewhat routinized in its use by the NIV translators and employed in places where a more careful consideration of the original vocabulary or the original context might have led them to retain the formally correspondent term:

¹¹² Readability is not, of course, the only factor in assessing a translation and, in the case of false doctrine, not even the most important factor. But it is, as mentioned before, a factor to be considered. The exact figures from the study are:

Voted best for English style or tied for best: NIV11 -- 91%; HCSB -- 22%; ESV -- 2%

Voted best for English style with ties counting as one half: NIV11 – 84%; HCSB – 15%; ESV – 1%

¹¹³ It is here that the naïve demand that translators not ‘interpret’ the text makes at least some sense. On the one hand, it is impossible for translators *not* to interpret the text. They have to understand what the original says in order to render it into the target language. That means they have to interpret. But there are times when functionally equivalent translators foreclose on options that might well be viable, even preferable, to what they put in the text. One could call this ‘overtranslation’ just as in some places I get the feeling that one who adopts a formal correspondence approach may ‘undertranslate.’ Choices have to be made, naturally, and not everyone can be satisfied with all the choices that a given translation makes. I also recognize that this is another complex issue that involves the practice of whether or not to employ explicitation, a translational device that makes *explicit*, information that is *implicit* in the text. For example, to audiences not familiar at all with the geography of Palestine, one might translate ‘Jerusalem’ with ‘*the city of Jerusalem.*’

Acts 1:16 where *andres adelphoi* is translated ‘brothers and sisters’ when the issue of choosing a successor to Judas is being brought up before the congregation; similarly in 6:3.

Philippians 1:14 (in a context of preaching) *adelphoi* is rendered ‘brothers and sisters.’

Many trees have already been felled in discussing the gender neutral translation of Psalm 8 and Hebrews 2. I don’t intend to add to their pile. Suffice it to say that the translators might have worked a little harder on preserving concordance between the two passages, in my opinion. I appreciate the fact that they put singular masculines in the footnotes. I would have preferred it if the footnotes had made it into the text. It would make it easier for the reader to grasp the literary allusion and interpret the passage as pointing to Christ. While their decision is open to criticism, for the sake of fairness I hasten to add that the CTCR’s recent assertion that the use of plurals ‘vitiates the Messianic meaning’ of the psalm is really a gross exaggeration.¹¹⁴

The following passages are only intended to serve as representative examples of other places in the NIV where I believe the translators were overzealous in their methods. The list is by no means exhaustive:

Numbers 16:30:...they go down alive into *the realm of the dead*...(for sheōl).

This could conjure up the notion that the Hebrews shared with Greeks and Romans the concept of a shadowy afterlife where all the dead go, as in Hades. Jeremiah 23:6: This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteous *Savior*.

I would have preferred they left the abstract noun rather than to replace it with a concrete noun as they did here. The punning with Zedekiah’s name is also somewhat obscured with this rendering.

John 6:63: The words I have spoken to you—they are *full of* the Spirit and life.

While this is not an incorrect way to handle nouns in the predicate, I would still have preferred the more direct and (in my opinion) more powerful “they *are* Spirit and life.”

John 17:12: None has been lost except the one *doomed to* destruction.

The Hebrew idiom ‘son of...something’ simply means that a person shares in a quality or thing, or is worthy of it. ‘Doomed’ raises thoughts of determinism that are contrary to the wider context of Scripture. ‘The one worthy of destruction’ would have been a perfectly adequate translation to convey the thought.

Romans 3:27:...the law *that requires* works? No, *because of* the law *that requires* faith.

I don’t see the need, first of all, for handling the *dia + gen.* construction with the English preposition ‘because.’ A simple ‘through’ or ‘by’ would have been sufficient. I also am not best pleased with the handling of the genitive *pisteōs* as ‘that requires.’ I would not go so far as to say that this is an incorrect way of handling the Greek genitive in English. It is one possibility. I do think it forecloses on other possibilities, however. I believe, in view of the context of Romans and in the wider context of Scripture, handling it as a simple descriptive genitive is better. “Works principle” and “faith principle” might be a good FE way

¹¹⁴ CTCR op. cit., 4.

of getting the idea across in the matched word pairs. I recognize that you are losing some concordance with the Greek word νόμος. Choices, choices!

Romans 7:3: So then, *if she has sexual relations with another man ...*

I'm still thinking this one over. Contextually it makes sense, but there are other possibilities for the phrase 'if she belongs to another man' including a second marriage or even living together. In short, the Greek is less explicit than the English here.

The NIV's translation of 1 Timothy 2:12 is also worth including on the list of NIV translations that could be improved. Since I have discussed it more fully in another place,¹¹⁵ I don't intend to spend any more time on it here.

In a way overtranslation can be seen as an inevitable by-product of the functionally equivalent approach. If you are seeking to communicate, you want to resolve all the ambiguities you possibly can. The more you leave 'as is,' the more difficult the text becomes to understand. Similarly, undertranslation can be seen as an inevitable by-product of the method of formal correspondence. The more closely you adhere to the forms and idioms of the original, the more difficult the text will be to understand. I see no easy way to resolve this tension. The choice of which kind of translation you want will lead to these kinds of results. Simply using words like 'accuracy,' 'precision,' and 'faithfulness' to resolve this tension do not help that much, as we will see.

Faithful to What?

Except for the radical postmodernists who are not too much interested in the notion of objective meaning, every translator with a high view of Scripture wants to convey the meaning of the inspired texts *accurately*. They want to be *faithful* to what God has moved the holy writers and prophets to say. "Purity of heart," said Kierkegaard, "is to will one thing." Unfortunately, faithfulness in translation is not one thing, but many things, and being faithful to one thing often means that the translator cannot be faithful to something else. Let me explain.

Translators are faced with a dizzying array of decisions that they have to make. Do I want to render the same Hebrew word with the same English word every time? If not, how flexible can I be in expressing the word's range of meanings with different English words? The more flexible I am, the more of the original's concordance is lost. Or what about sentence length? Coordination and subordination? Different languages, as we have seen, have different levels of tolerance for these things. Hebrew loves its 'ands';¹¹⁶ Greek does not. Greek prefers long sentences; English does not.

With the use of repetition, connecting particles, rhetorical questions, demonstrative pronouns, synonymous phrases, and syntactical patterns, I can see how the Apostle Paul causes his letter to the Romans to hang together conceptually and flow well from one section to the next (coherence and cohesion).¹¹⁷ How much of this *must* I preserve? How

¹¹⁵ Evaluating the NIV 2011 translation of 1 Timothy 2:12, accessible at: <http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/Evaluating%20the%20NIV11.pdf>.

¹¹⁶ This was one of the reasons why St. Augustine characterized the Bible as possessing a *vox humilis*—a humble manner of speaking. It lacked the participles and the subordination he was used to from his training in Latin rhetoric.

¹¹⁷ See Wendland, "Literary Approach" in Wilt, *op. cit*, 182.

much of it *can* I preserve especially if different languages have different ways of achieving these same goals?

What about the matter of language register? Some books in the New Testament, like the gospel of Mark and the gospel of John, are written in fairly simple Greek, with a relatively low incidence of unusual vocabulary. Other books are decidedly more complex in their use of language. Paul's letter to the Romans comes to mind or the elegant Greek we see in 1 Peter and Hebrews. Should the translation reflect this, using a more difficult and complex English for the more difficult books and easier English for the easier books? I would answer, "Yes," but I know that not all would agree.

What about the sheer beauty of the Scriptures: the rhythms of the Psalms, the poetic genius of Isaiah, the rhetorical power of Paul? Many times we can see things 'going on' in the Greek or the Hebrew that we cannot reproduce in English (like the plosive 'p' in Philippians 1:3-5; or the Hebrew penchant for wordplay and puns). But we feel somewhat disloyal all the same because we know the English reader is going to miss out on some of the power and punch of the original.

What I mean to say is that words like accuracy and faithfulness are not scientific terms that are easily definable and effortlessly reflected in translation. Decisions are inevitable. There will be losses, even if we agree that the conveying of cognitive meaning is paramount.¹¹⁸ I know how much a good and faithful translator mourns those losses and wishes it were otherwise. More than anything, this discussion points to the need for translators to agree on some common guidelines before they translate a single word. It also points to the need for translators (and readers) to specify what they expect in a translation and for what purposes they intend to use it. Finally, it should put to rest the notion that there is a perfect way of translating if we can only find it.

For Whom and To Do What With?¹¹⁹

Translation studies and theories have come a long way since Nida. It is outside the scope of this paper to trace all the developments.¹²⁰ For our purpose it is enough to point out that translators are moving away from prescriptivist ('only right way') approaches to more practical and pragmatic ones. The sunny eyed optimism of believing that "anything that can be said in one language can be said in another" has yielded to more modest dreams.

A functionalist like Christiane Nord suggests we approach¹²¹ the work of translation by asking two basic questions: 1) for whom is this translation intended; and 2) what does the audience want to do with it? To begin with, one might want to issue an obvious caveat: if a translation shifts its focus from the source text to the target audience, this approach can easily degenerate into a philosophy of 'just give the people what they want.' I do not believe

¹¹⁸ "It is in fact impossible to convey the full semantic and pragmatic value of the original text in any translation...a choice must be made [regarding] which aspects of the text the translators will at least attempt to convey in the target language and which elements they admit will probably be lost in translation" Mojola and Wendland, *op. cit.*, 17.

¹¹⁹ I am indebted to Prof. Ken Cherney for this pithy phrase.

¹²⁰ Although you might consult Mojola and Wendland "Scripture Translation in the Era of Translation Studies, *op.cit.* esp. 10-25; and Cherney, *op. cit.*

¹²¹ As represented by Christiane Nord in *Translating as a Purposeful Activity: Functionalist Approaches Explained*. St. Jerome, 1997.

that is Nord's intention. Rather, her desire is that "translators justify their decisions in order to make others...understand what was done and why."¹²² Nevertheless the danger is there and functionalist translators must bear in mind that, with Scripture, they are working with a sacred and inspired text. This has to command our highest loyalty.

Operating, however, in a context in which a high view of Scripture prevails, I can see great value in asking these questions. For one thing, it allows for latitude in making decisions on which translation a congregation or synod should use. On the basis of those questions, I might say, "It depends!" If a congregation has long been accustomed to the KJV or the RSV, yet wants to use a more 'contemporary' version, why shouldn't they use the ESV if they wish? If, on the other hand, a congregation has used the old NIV for many years, the new NIV might be the best choice, causing the fewest disruptions.

Also within congregational life, I can see the usefulness of different versions in different settings. In a Bible class, I would not only allow but encourage the use of an FC version—side by side with one that is more FE in its approach. I would personally encourage the use of an FE version in public reading, in personal reading, and in memorization. But for careful study and close reading of the text, I would advocate the use of an FC version. I realize that my pastoral opinions on these matters may not be shared by all. To me that's fine: one size does not have to fit all. Let us not speak ill of another's good.

In this connection I might just mention a cultural difference between the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) and the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS), viewed as target audiences. It is my impression that the NIV never had the kind of broad support in the ELS that it enjoys in WELS. For quite some time, many in the ELS have been accustomed to using more formally equivalent versions, like the KJV, the NASB, and the NKJV. I can readily see that, in such a setting, moving to the NIV—especially considering the gender inclusive matter—might not be the preferred option. For WELS it is different. Even if we didn't have August Pieper ringing in our ears, we've been using the NIV almost exclusively for more than thirty years. The ESV simply sounds strange to most of us and hard to understand. Our dilemma has always been, "If not the NIV, what?"

That being said, from my experiences on the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee, I have reached the tentative conclusion that the days are over in which one version like the NIV can retain the overwhelming preeminence among us that it once enjoyed. While it may still be used by the majority, I believe that a significant minority would prefer something else. Judging from the comments I have heard and the things I have read, this minority also has a distinct preference for a version that is more formally than functionally equivalent. As a synod we have in the past approved a single version for use in our publishing house. From this flowed the version's widespread adoption by pastors and congregations. I wonder whether Northwestern Publishing House will still be able to follow such a 'single version' policy in the future. Perhaps it is just as well to acknowledge the fact that we live in the age of eclecticism.

Above All—Charity!

Whether we prefer functional equivalence or formal correspondence in our translation, my earnest prayer and fervent hope is that we can live with one another in peace, without passing judgment on each other's preferences. What has troubled me the most about some

¹²² Ibid., 91.

of the things I have read and heard during the past two years is the way laypeople, especially, can be affected by the heat of the discussion. Some don't know what to think. For others, the discussion has driven a wedge between them and their Bibles. "How can I trust what is in there?" they wonder. Some—hearing the discussion on the NIV—have become suspicious of all functional equivalence in translation. I do not think we serve God's people by ginning up their fears.

No translation is perfect. No translational approach is either. One thing is sure. Old translations will pass away. New ones will come to take their place. All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. A translation—to the extent that it is a product of human skill and effort—is also one of those flowers. It springs up, is lovely for a time, but in the end it, too, must wither and fall. Let us rather rest our hearts *on* and point our people *to* this one unshakable truth: the Word of our God endures forever!

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