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Editorial The Church as a Peacemaker

The horrendous fact of our time is the escalation of violence; whether viewed in the light of millions of abortions, multiplying tribal, racial or religious wars, or the mounting threat of nuclear holocaust. The world is spending a million dollars a minute on war and the arms race while one-fifth of the human race live in starvation and inhuman living conditions. Christians are faced with moral choices that were inconceivable to an earlier generation. In our global crises, a biblical realism of judgement and hope demands that Christians re-examine their theological systems and their ethical assumptions. A confused ethic all too often reflects a truncated theology that fragments the Gospel into neat water-tight compartments. We hide behind our eschatological hope.

Today there are many claimants to world peace and justice. Islam with its claim of religious superiority offers its *shar'iah* law of moral absolutes and detailed rules for daily living, while Marxism offers an ideology pledged to 'the consolidation and flowering of the world socialist system'. The NATO and Warsaw Alliances offer peace through nuclear deterrents to a world threatened with self-annihilation.

What has the Church to offer? To his disciples Jesus said, 'Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called sons of God'. How realistic is it for the church to be a peace maker between nations and peoples? Only if she is true to her spiritual and moral nature and willing to follow her Lord in his mission in the world. Only a reforming and a renewed Church will have the inner moral power to rebuke evil, to break down suspicion and hatred between peoples and to build confidence in peace and justice between nations. Unless the Church is both salt and light it can be neither the conscience of the nations nor the hope of eternal salvation for a transformed society. But first the Church must know the way of the Cross—God's power through human powerlessness and suffering. It must participate in the miraculous power of prayer. It must be a peace maker to its own fragmented community before it can be a peace maker to the world. The Church must believe and obey the whole Gospel. The WEF Theological Commission is beginning to address itself to these global issues. 'The Gospel speaks to the Nations' is the expected theme of its next plenary meeting—scheduled for June 27–July 2 1986 at Singapore. Some of the articles and reviews in this issue of ERT speak to this agenda.

The Limits of Dynamic Equivalence in Bible Translation

D. A. Carson

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In this article the author welcomes the careful use of dynamic equivalent principles in Bible translation but warns against the abuses of applying the principle beyond the limits of linguistic priorities and of absolutizing the dichotomy between meaning and message. Readers' response to these issues is welcomed.
(Editor)

Generally speaking, a newly minted expression no sooner triumphs, capturing a revered place in an ever widening circle of users, than it is debased. Its very triumph almost ensures its defeat, especially if it is a clever, catchy, quasi-technical term, for its very popularity will prompt many to use it even though they do not possess any deep understanding of the setting which called it into being or of the limitations of its original context.

THE TRIUMPH OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE TRANSLATIONS

So it is with 'dynamic equivalence.' As far as those who struggle with biblical translation are concerned, dynamic equivalence has won the day—and rightly so. Its victory is hailed by many signs of the times. There is widespread recognition of the dismal inadequacy of merely formal equivalence in translation, buttressed by thousands and thousands of examples. Undergirding such recognition is the belated understanding that terms such as 'literal translation' and 'paraphrase' are steeped in ambiguity, and in any case belong, not in mutually exclusive categories, but on the same spectrum:[1] a 'too-literal' translation can be as bad as a 'too-paraphrastic' translation, if for different reasons. Few translators of any competence would today deny such fundamental sets of priorities as the following:

> (1) contextual consistency has priority over verbal consistency (or word-for-word concordance), (2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence, (3) the aural (heard) form of language has priority over the written form, (4) forms that are used by and acceptable to the audience for which a translation is intended have priority over forms that may be traditionally more prestigious.[2]

Dynamic equivalence displays its triumph in the publishing houses, in the continuing parade of multiplying helps,[3] front rank research,[4] manuals of problems,[5] reflective textbooks,[6] assorted popularizations[7] and sane assessments of recent translations.[8] Missiologists are now comfortable with classifications of languages based not on their

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[1] On the 'spectrum' nature of translations, see for instance John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974) 19–32; Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981) 23–34.

[2] Eugene A. Nida and Charles R. *Taber, The Theory and Practice of Translation* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974) 14.

[3] We may think, for instance, of the growing list of handbooks/commentaries for translators, published by UBS.

[4] It is risky to single out individual items for special praise. However, representing quite different contributions, one may think of recent developments in discourse analysis; of sophisticated and creative individual essays like that of Kenneth L. Pike, 'Agreement Types Dispersed into a Nine-Cell Spectrum,' along with other contributions to *On Language, Culture and Religion*, ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 275–286; of developments in computer software that are promising new and sophisticated lexical, grammatical and syntactical concordances.

[5] E.g. Mildred Larson, *A Manual for Problem Solving in Bible Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

[6] E.g. Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice; William L. Wonderly, Bible Translations for Popular Use* (London: UBS, 1968); and many others.

[7] The list is so long that it cannot be registered here. Many articles in *The Bible Translator* fit into this category.

[8] E.g. Sakae Kubo and Walter Specht, *So Many Versions? Twentieth Century English Versions of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975); Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981).

roots (e.g. Indo-European, Semitic) as on their use (or non-use) in literature and education (primary, secondary, tertiary, quaternary), and they have become sensitive to the differences between translating the Bible in an 'overlap language' (one in which the colloquial and the literary forms of the language overlap significantly, e.g. English) and translating the Bible almost exclusively at a literary level (e.g. Arabic).[9] As they have been sensitized to the kinds of readers, so they sympathize with the very different linguistic needs of diverse readers within any particular language or dialect. There is a new appreciation for the work of the receptor-language stylist in the translation process;[10] and in the best seminaries, lecturers in Greek and Hebrew p. 202 take extra pains to convey a literary feel for the biblical languages, no less than the rudiments of their grammar. Even unreconstructed grammarians such as myself, thoroughly convinced that a profound and growing knowledge of the donor languages is a great *desideratum* in Bible translation, are no less concerned to expose their students to the elements of modern linguistic theory and practice. At least in part, all of this has come about because dynamic equivalence, rightly understood, is essential for good translation. Only the linguistically incompetent would today argue that the translator needs facility in the languages with which he or she is working, but not understanding of the content of the text. At its best, dynamic equivalence, far from jeopardizing good translation, is essential for fidelity in translation[11]—fidelity in conveying meaning, tone, emotional impact, naturalness/ awkwardness and much more.

THE POTENTIAL FOR ABUSE

Unfortunately, now that 'dynamic equivalence' is so popular, it is not infrequently abused. I hasten to add that the most careful scholars in the field do not err in this way. What is still one of the finest books in the area, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, by Nida and Taber,[12] abounds in wise and sensitive caveats. For example, the translator is carefully warned against trying to get behind the biblical writer, or ahead of him;[13] and he is cautioned not to confuse linguistic translation with 'cultural translation,' transforming the Pharisees and Sadducees, for instance, into present-day religious parties.[14] In other words, the historical particularity of the text is to be respected.

But sadly, similar care is not shown by all. The caveats and restrictions which make dynamic equivalence so useful a way of thinking about translation are sometimes overlooked or abandoned; and this route has become progressively easier to follow as professional missiologists have come to think of contextualization in highly diverse

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[9] See the popular summary by Eugene A. Nida, 'Bible Translation for the Eighties,' *International Review of Mission* 70 (1981) 132–133.

[10] Nida, *ibid.* 136–137, goes so far as to recommend that Bible translation teams consider adopting the procedure of United Nations and European Common Market translation departments, whose *first* drafts are produced by stylists of the receptor language, the specialists checking their work as a second step (instead of the inverse order).

[11] Cf. Beekman/Callow, *Translating* 33–44.

[12] As in n.2, *supra*.

[13] *Ibid.* 8.

[14] *Ibid.* 12–13.

ways,[15] and as such theoretical developments as the new p. 203 hermeneutic and what might be called philosophical structuralism have made their own impact on the translator and his art.[16] Such developments are so complex I dare not broach them here, except tangentially. But it may be useful to offer a number of reflections on dynamic equivalence and related concepts, reflections which may help translators avoid the pitfalls inherent in some of these developments. It is worth insisting one more time, at the outset, that the best practitioners of dynamic equivalence have always observed the contents of this list, even if they might not phrase their positions this way. In other words, I am not surreptitiously advocating the overthrow of the principles of dynamic equivalence, but rather encouraging clarity of thought and the adoption of necessary caveats.

LIMITS TO EQUIVALENCE OF RESPONSE

The most common descriptions of 'dynamic equivalence,' as insightful as they are, must be guarded against as having considerable potential for abuse. In a work now considered a classic, Nida describes 'dynamic equivalence translation' as the 'closest natural equivalent to the source-language message' and insists it is 'directed primarily toward equivalence of response rather than equivalence of form.'[17] Again:

> Dynamic equivalence is therefore to be defined in terms of the degree to which the receptors of the message in the receptor language respond to it in substantially the same manner as the receptors in the source language. This response can never be identical, for the cultural and historical settings are too different, but there should be a high degree of equivalence of response, or the translation will have failed to accomplish its purpose.[18]

Or, as Mundhenk remarks, 'In the final analysis, a translation is good or bad, right or wrong, in terms of how the reader understands and reacts.'[18]

I have no quarrel with these quotations, all three of which stress equivalence of response, *as long as they are referring to linguistic priorities alone*. Clearly, a translation is poor if by preserving formal equivalence in word order or syntactical construction or the like it p. 204 obscures the meaning of the original text, or transmutes it into something quite different, or remains completely opaque to those whose tongue is the receptor language. Moreover, selecting appropriate linguistic priorities requires a sensitive knowledge of the receptor culture, since there may be cultural associations between linguistic constructions and cultural values such that an entirely false impression is conveyed—false, that is to say, as measured by what was originally conveyed. 'Blessed is the man who does not … stand in the way of sinners' (Psa. 1:1, NIV) is a shockingly poor rendering of the Hebrew, because 'to stand in someone's way' in English means 'to hinder

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[15] See, for instance, the discussions by David Hesselgrave (along with the responses, and his rejoinder), 'The Contextualization Continuum,' *Gospel in Context* 2/3 (July, 1979) 4–26; and James O. Buswell, III, 'Contextualization: Theory, Tradition and Method,' *Theology and Mission: Papers Given at Trinity Consultation No. 1* ed. David J. Hesselgrave (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978) 87–111.

[16] Bibliography in these areas is extensive. The most significant contributions are listed in D. A. Carson, 'Hermeneutics: A brief assessment of some recent trends,' *Themelios* 5/2 (January 1980) 12–20, to which must be added the excellent work by A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

[17] Eugene A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: Brill, 1964) 166.

[18] Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice* 24.

[18] Nida/Taber, *Theory and Practice* 24.

someone,' whereas the thought in Hebrew is 'to walk in someone's footsteps,' 'to walk in someone's moccasins' or, less metaphorically, 'to adopt someone else's lifestyle and values and habits.' There are far more difficult cases discussed in the standard texts; and, as pursued by a linguistics expert such as Nida, 'dynamic equivalence' is surely in these cases an eminently worthwhile goal which no one competent in two or more languages would wish to gainsay.

Nevertheless, there are several ways in which the expression 'dynamic equivalence' can easily be abused. Perhaps it is best to provide illustrations of several kinds of abuse; and, to focus discussion, I shall draw them from the writings of Charles Kraft. *First*, it is increasingly common so to focus on the 'response' aspect of dynamic equivalence that several weighty matters are overlooked. At the extreme, the resulting 'versions' may be called 'transculturations' (to use the language of Kraft).[20]

Kraft acknowledges, 'In a translation it is inappropriate to give the impression that Jesus walked the streets of Berkeley or London or Nairobi. But a transculturation, in order to reach its target audience effectively, may do exactly that.'[21] These transculturations 'dare to be *specific to their audiences and free to be true to God's imperative to communicate rather than simply to impress*. In this they demonstrate the deep concern of their authors for the total communicational situation, not simply for one or another aspect of it.'[22] Kraft then goes on to suggest (as he does elsewhere) that those who disagree with his p. 205 diagnosis and react negatively against 'proper transculturation' are the modern equivalents of the 'orthodox' retainers of the old cultural forms' against whom Jesus 'waged a running battle for culturally relevant transculturation,' or of the 'orthodox' Judaizers of Acts 15.[23]

These assessments raise a host of issues. A glimpse of them may be afforded by a series of questions: Did Jesus primarily or even marginally set himself against the Jewish religious leaders of his day out of concern for the transculturation of an agreed message, or out of a fundamental break with his opponents' understanding of Scripture? How much of his disagreement stemmed from their failure to perceive the new developments on the salvation-historical plane, his claims to fulfill Old Testament expectations concerning the coming of the Messiah? How valid, logically speaking, is the constant disjunction Kraft raises between his own approach to 'dyanamic-equivalence transculturation' and a kind of incompetent fixation upon mere content devoid of desire and/or ability to communicate? Is the disjunction essentially fair, or does it approach caricature?

When we say we aim to generate the same response in the readers of the receptor language as in the readers of the donor language, what do we mean? Suppose the readers of the original New Testament document were largely alienated by the truth of what Paul wrote: should we aim to reproduce similiar alienation today, in order to preserve 'equivalence of response'? Can we expect *exactly* the same response among the urban, secularized, twentieth century readers of Leviticus or of Romans as their respective first readers? Is it not better, if we are going to define 'dynamic equivalence' in terms of equivalent response, to understand such equivalence in linguistic categories, i.e. in terms of the removal of as many as possible of the false linguistic barriers (along with the

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[20] Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture: A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979) 276–290. Note that Kraft titles this chapter 'Dynamic-Equivalence Transculturation of the Message.'

[21] Kraft, *Christianity in Culture* 284.

[22] *Ibid.* 286 (emphasis is Kraft's).

[23] *Ibid.* 287.

associations each linguistic category carries) which actually impede the communication of truth?

Each of these questions could easily generate its own paper; and one or two of them will re-emerge in subsequent points. I think it is clear, however, that the hidden fallacy against which many of these questions are directed is the unwitting assumption that 'response' is the *ultimate* category in translation. Strictly speaking, that is not true; theologically speaking, it is unwise; evangelistically speaking, it is uncontrolled, not to say dangerous. I hasten to add that I am not surreptitiously supporting obscurity in translation or obscurantism in scholarship. The concerns Kraft is feeling are real ones, and need addressing. My criticism is more fundamental: his solution, the p. 206 elevation of response above truth, fails precisely in the areas where it claims to be strong, for the response is *not* rendered equivalent by such means as he advances. The aim of a good translation is to convey the total content—informational, emotional, connotational etc.— of the original message to the reader (or 'hearer,' where the translation is read publicly) in the secondary language.

LIMITS OF EQUIVALENCE OF THEOLOGIZING

We read in contemporary literature on missiology of 'dynamicequivalence theologizing'[24] and 'dynamic-equivalence churches.'[25] Once again, the concerns behind these labels are real. For example, biblically faulty and/or culturally myopic ecclesiastical structures may be imposed on a mission church as if the entire blue-print were handed down from heaven, complete with robes for the choir and Roberts' Rules of Order. Nevertheless, all such evils are better addressed without talking of 'dynamic equivalence churches,' because: (a) As the expression is used by its inventor, social custom becomes so controlling a feature that the Scriptures are not permitted to reform society. Kraft appeals to the Kru of Liberia who state that 'You cannot trust a man with only one wife,'[26] concluding that Kru church leadership need not be monogamous, despite Paul's strictures on this point. Kraft thinks that eventually polygamy would likely die out among the Kru, 'Just as, through God's interaction with the Hebrews, polygamy died out in Hebrew culture—over the course of a few thousand years.'[27] Until then, polygamy should be tolerated. There seems to be, from Kraft's examples, few things which the Bible seems clearly to demand of church structure, which could not be jettisoned in favor of 'dynamic-equivalence churches.' (b) More important, the extension of the expression 'dynamic equivalence' into areas far removed not only from linguistic priorities but also from translation itself reflects back on problems of translation and muddies otherwise clear distinctions. In the name of an ill-defined and infinitely plastic 'dynamic equivalence,' almost any translational aberration may be justified. **P. 207**

LIMITS TO THE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN MEANING AND MESSAGE

Whereas the expression 'dynamic equivalence' started out as a category belonging to the realm of translation and set in opposition to various kinds of linguistic formalism, the

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[24] This is the title of chapter 15 of Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*.

[25] Cf. Charles H. Kraft, 'Dynamic Equivalence Churches,' *Missiology* 1 (1979) 39–57.

[26] *Ibid.* 54.

[27] *Ibid.*

extension of its use to far broader issues is currently being grounded in a variety of faddish theoretical constructs which do not stand up to rigorous scholarship but which are cited with ill-deserved authority as if the subjects with which they deal were closed— e.g. the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis,[28] the New Hermeneutic,[29] and some recent communication theory. The first, in its crudest form, makes human beings the determined captives of their language, and their language becomes a guide to their 'social reality.' The second, in its extreme form, calls in question the possibility of objective knowledge as text and interpreter progressively 'interpret' one another, without *terminus*, lost in profound relativity. The third, conjoined with structuralism, insists that there is a rigid dichotomy between meaning and message. All three of these notions, wittingly or unwittingly, lie not far from the surface of the following lines:

> Contemporary understandings contend that a major difference between messages and meanings lie in the fact that messages can be transmitted in linguistic form while meanings exist only in the hearts and minds of people. Contemporary communiologists (*sic*) see communicators with meanings in their minds that they would like to transmit to receptors. Communicators take these meanings and formulate them, usually in linguistic form, into messages which they then transmit to receptors. Receptors then, listen to the messages and construct within their minds sets of meanings that may or may not correspond with the meanings intended by the communicator.
>
> Meanings, therefore, do not pass from me to you, only messages. The meanings exist only within me or within you.… The messages, then, serve as stimulators rather than as containers. Receptors, in response to the stimulus of messages construct meanings that may or may not correspond to what the communicator intended.[30]

There is considerable insight here, of course. Each man is finite in his understanding, and the potential for misunderstanding increases when the message is translated. Communicators do not always say exactly what they mean, and the best communicators will try to encourage the feedback necessary to discover whether their meaning has been absorbed by the receptors. Nevertheless, as stated these lines present their case too disjunctively. *Some* 'contemporary understandings contend that there is a major difference between messages and meanings', but others, while recognizing that any individual communication may be imperfectly grasped, nevertheless insist that the message/meaning disjunction, taken absolutely, is one form of the intentional fallacy, that human beings cannot entertain complex meanings without propositions, and that therefore meaning and message, though not identical, cannot be divided absolutely, that the commonality of our creaturehood in the image of God makes verbal communication less problematic than some think; that even participant knowledge can be verbalized among those who share common participant experience (whether sex or knowing God); that the individual can 'fuse' his 'horizon of understanding' with the 'horizon of understanding' of the communicator in order to assure *true* understanding of the message, even if it may not be *exhaustive* understanding; that meanings can and do pass from one person to the other; that messages are neither mere stimulators nor mere communicators, but the very stuff of the meaning, insofar as the two individuals share semantic ranges and the like, and insofar as the communicator says what he means.

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[28] For a recent discussion, see Harry Hoijer, 'The Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis,' *Intercultural Communication: A Reader*, ed. Larry A. Samovar and Richard E. Porter (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1972) 114–123.

[29] See above, n. 16.

[30] Charles H. Kraft, 'Communicating the Gospel God's Way,' *Ashland Theological Bulletin* 12 (1979) 34–35.

Much more needs to be said on this first, difficult point, but this sketch must serve to remind us that adherence to 'dynamic equivalence' as a linguistic principle in translation does not commit one to a considerable conceptual baggage increasingly common in the literature.

LIMITS TO THE EQUIVALENCE OF BIBLICAL HISTORY

Dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to override the historical particularity of the Bible. There is a sense in which any text is historically conditioned. Even in the case of proverbs and aphorisms, those most timeless of literary forms, some examples will prove more easily adaptable than others. 'Do you see a man wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him' ([Proverbs 26:12](#)) is likely to be coherent in most languages; 'Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife' ([Proverbs 25:24](#)) presupposes flat roofs frequented by humans, not snow-shedding sloped roofs never visited except to replace a gutter or a TV aerial. The problem becomes much more difficult when we leave aphorism and come to narrative. The problems of equivalence can be grouped under the headings (1) ecology, (2) material culture, (3) social culture, (4) **P. 209** religious culture, and (5) linguistic culture.[31] There is no simple way to categorize the possible solutions; and the problems are very diverse. An Eskimo tribe reads a Bible that speaks of desert and lions; a Mexican tribe in Yucatan has never experienced the four seasons typical of temperate zones (cf. [Mark 13:28](#)). If we follow TEV's 'police' or NEB's 'constable' in [Matthew 5:25](#), are we not unwittingly fostering images of a gun-toting officer or an English bobby? Perhaps these cases don't matter; perhaps 'police' is acceptable. But many cases have stings in the tail. If for instance we replace 'recline at food' or 'recline at table' with 'sit down to eat', we are going to have a tough job imagining how John managed to get his head on Jesus' breast. Preservation of descriptions of what is to us an alien custom, reclining at tables, makes it possible to understand a later action, John placing his head on Jesus' breast.

I am not now dealing with such obvious distortions as 'this is the essence of all true religion' ([Matthew 7:12](#), Phillips) for 'this sums up the Law and the Prophets' (NIV), or 'then a diabolical plan came into the mind of Judas' ([Luke 22:3](#), Phillips) for 'Then Satan entered Judas' (NIV). Rather, what interests me at this juncture is that God has revealed himself to men in time-space history—to particular men and women, spatially and temporally and linguistically located. If we are not very cautious about the way we treat the historical particulars, we may introduce such substantive anachronisms that the story becomes intrinsically unbelievable—especially as the receptor tribe grows in understanding and historical awareness. There are ways of overcoming the obscureness intrinsic in references to customs and experiences unknown on receptor soil—for instance, Scripture notes and teachers (further discussed below), and meanwhile, we must ask how much we are losing when we remove too many indicators of historical and cultural 'distance.' How such problems are resolved may depend to some extent on the literary stage of development of the receptor group, but even if the group is coming across the printed page for the first time, and enjoys virtually no comprehension of cultures other than their own, it must be remembered that this receptor group will likely use this new translation of the Bible for decades to come, maybe a century or two. During all of that time, an increasing number of this receptor people will be exposed to new cultures and education. How well will the Bible translation serve then? Christianity is a religion p.

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[31] Eugene Nida, 'Linguistics and Ethnology in Translation: Problems,' *Word* 1 (1945) 196.

whose roots are deeply imbedded in the particularities of history, and our translations must not obscure that fact.

LIMITS TO THE EQUIVALENCE OF SALVATION HISTORY

Dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to mask the development of and internal relations within salvation history. Suppose, for instance, a tribe has a long tradition of sacrificing pigs, but has never so much as heard of sheep. Is it in that case justifiable to render John 1:29, 'Look, the swine of God, who takes away the sin of the world!'? I would argue strongly in the negative, not only because of the importance of historical particularity, defended in the last point, but because of the plethora of rich allusions preserved in Scripture across the sweep of salvation history. In what sense does Jesus 'fulfill' the Old Testament sacrificial system if that system sacrificed lambs on the Day of Atonement and at Passover, whereas Jesus is portrayed as a swine? How then will John 1:29 relate to Isa 52:13–53:12, the fourth servant song, or to images of the warrior lamb in the Apocalypse (e.g. Revelation 5:6)? Shall we change *all* such references to 'pigs' ('All we like swine have gone astray....')? And if so, do we then make the biblical pig-references clean, and designate some other animal unclean? No; it is surely simpler to preserve 'lamb' in the first instance. If this involves inventing a new word, so be it: a brief note could explain that the word refers to an animal frequently sacrificed by the people of the Bible, along with a succinct description of the animal's characteristics.

There is a second way in which appeal to dynamic equivalence must not be permitted to mask the development and internal relations of salvation history. We have witnessed a negative example in Kraft's appeal to polygamy under the old covenant. What Kraft never struggles with is the nature of the continuity/discontinuity pattern when moving from old covenant to new. One can no more make legitimate appeal to the Old Testament to support polygamy among Christian leaders than one can appeal to the OT to defend continued Christian maintenance of all dietary laws. The fact that Christians disagree over certain details on the continuity/discontinuity pattern is no justification for the failure to wrestle with the issue when dealing with something as sensitive in parts of Africa as is polygamy.[32]

THE NECESSITY FOR GOOD EXEGETES AND GRAMMARIANS

In the light of these observations, I am inclined, somewhat hesitantly, to call in question the judgment of Nida and others, who argue that good exegetes and grammarians make poor translators.[33] Increasingly, they say that translation projects should begin with stylists who enjoy some marginal knowledge of Greek and Hebrew but who are competent in the receptor language and permit the specialists their say only at the cleaning up stage.

Quite clearly the gifts and training of the stylists are necessary. But I wonder if grammarians and exegetes are dismissed too rapidly. Most field translators for such organizations as Wycliffe Bible Translators and the American Bible Society have one theological degree, perhaps two—i.e. two or three years (i.e. four to six semester courses) of Greek, and perhaps half that of Hebrew. Their problem, it may be, is not that they have

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[32] For a detailed attempt to wrestle with problems of continuity and discontinuity, with substantial implications for the topic at hand, see D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

[33] Most recently, Nida argues the point in 'Bible Translation for the Eighties,' 136–137.

too much Greek, but too little. I would go further, and suggest that even many teachers of Greek and Hebrew in colleges, seminaries and universities do not enjoy much facility in the language. These are precisely the kind of people who are least likely to be sensitive to the demands of 'dynamic equivalence.' How often, for example, have I taken second year Greek students aside and explained at length how rarely a Greek participle should be rendered by an English participle, how many of the Greek connectives must find no equivalent in an English word but in the flow of English style, and so forth. And I have learned that it is my *best* students in advanced exegesis and advanced grammar courses who learn such flexibility most thoroughly. To be good translators, they would benefit from further study in linguistics and in literary style; but at a guess, advanced competence in the donor languages will not prove a hindrance but a strength in most cases, *provided the teacher is aware* of the linguistic complexities and subtleties that surround translation.

The reason I have suggested this alternative theory—and I admit it is only theory—is because the drift in many academic circles is toward so great a flexibility in translation that, as we have seen, 'communication' becomes an ideal abstracted from the message to be communicated, and new voices loudly insist there is an impregnable wedge between the meaning of the donor and the meaning of the receptor. To provide safeguards against these erroneous positions, we must encourage translators not only to pursue studies in linguistics and style, but to steep themselves in the languages, history, culture, symbolism, genre and theology of the biblical documents. Only then is it possible to 'fuse horizons' with high reliability, and counteract the growing tide of relativism and arbitrariness.

Although 'dynamic equivalence' is an important component of translation, we should tone down our claims for what it can achieve. Precisely because dynamic equivalence is customarily described in terms of equivalent response, we are in danger of leaving the impression that, provided we get our translations right, we can practically guarantee a massive turning to Christ. We have no place for an Ethiopian eunuch who needed someone to explain a grammatically clear text, no place for the hardness of the human heart (I Corinthians 2:14), no place for the work of the Holy Spirit, no consideration of a rapidly growing and alarming set of secular presuppositions around the world, both within the church and outside it.[34] Do not the Scriptures themselves encourage us to multiply the number of evangelists, pastors/teachers and other workers, thereby discouraging the notion that the *entire* task depends exclusively on the quality of the Bible translation used? This is not to justify obscure translations on the basis of, say, total depravity or the like: if people do not understand the Word of God, let it not be because we have lacked wisdom in our task as translators. Yet in our defence of dynamic equivalence, we should, especially at the popular level, curb our exuberance, lest we jeopardize our credibility by the extravagance of our claims. The proper use of dynamic equivalence translations decreases the likelihood of misunderstanding arising from poor translation, but it is not a universal spiritual panacea.

THE USE AND LIMITS OF STUDY NOTES

I have at several points suggested that it is better to preserve the historical distance of the original text and to provide an explanatory note. This raises the question of the place of study notes and study Bibles. Nida and Taber offer several wise observations in this regard. Perhaps my favorite is that 'it is best at least to make sense in the text and put the

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[34] See, *inter alia*, William D. Reyburn, 'Secular Culture, Missions, and Spiritual Values,' *On Language, Culture, and Religion*, ed. Matthew Black and William A. Smalley (The Hague: Mouton, 1974) 287–299.

scholarly caution in the margin, rather than to make nonsense in the text and offer the excuse in the margin.'[35]

But my purpose here is to offer a further caution. Because I do not p. 213 think that, by and large, dynamic equivalence should override the distancing that stems both from historical particularism and from the history of redemption, I favor a fairly liberal use of notes explaining cultural, religious, ecological and linguistic points, especially in Bibles designed for groups made up largely of first readers who therefore have very little knowledge of the world outside their own setting. But great pains should be taken to make those notes as 'neutral' and as objective as possible. Theological notes, hortatory comments, notes explaining the flow, homiletical hints—all should be relegated to separate books. The impetus for this judgment is twofold: (a) In this way are we less likely to impose on the new converts the details of a theological framework that may be in some measure faulty, or perhaps with emphases tangential to their perceived world. (b) I grew up in Québec where, at the time, if Roman Catholics would read the Bible at all, it would be with Roman Catholic notes (such as the Léger version of the New Testament). I witnessed first hand how such notes could brainwash a people. Even when theoretical allowance is made for the distinction between text and note, the constant re-reading of both on the same page in practice blurs this distinction and shapes the theological convictions of the reader. What applies to the Léger version applies *mutatis mutandis* to the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, the *Ryrie Study Bible* and half a dozen others. It would be good to avoid transmitting our mistakes in this area to the mission fields where Bibles are appearing in new languages for the first time. Equally, it would be good to remember that the God of the Bible ordained that there would be evangelists and teachers in his church. Translation of the Scriptures is not the only thing needed for adequate communication of the gospel: God has equally mandated the training and deployment of evangelists and pastor/teachers. Failure to account for this aspect of our task may unwittingly encourage a 'translation' that is to some degree a perceived *replacement* of human agents.

In observing such qualifications on 'dynamic equivalence' as the ones I have suggested in this article, perhaps we shall retard the debasement of the expression now in progress, and, more important, encourage reliable translation of the Word of God.[36]

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[35] *Theory and Practice* 30.

[36] After completing this paper, I was loaned (by Dr. David Hesselgrave) the latest book by Eugene A. Nida and William D. Reyburn, *Meaning Across Cultures* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1981). I am delighted to say that they raise somewhat similar warnings and, with far more linguistic competence at their disposal than I have, provide numerous colorful examples.