DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY:
ITS INFLUENCE AND ERROR

by David Cloud

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There are two things that are required for a sound Bible translation. The first is that it must be translated from the right Hebrew and Greek texts. The second is that it must use the right method of translation. Just as there are two competing Greek texts today (the Received Text underlying the Reformation Bibles such as the German Luther and the English King James vs. the Westcott-Hort line of Greek texts underlying most of the modern English versions since the latter half of the 19th century), there are also two competing translation methodologies. One is the literal or formal equivalence method, the type that was used to create the Reformation Bibles such as the KJV, and the other is the dynamic equivalency method. Modern English Bibles such as the New International Version, the Today's English Version, The Message, and the Contemporary English Version fail on both counts. They are loose dynamic equivalency renderings of the wrong Greek text. Modern English Bibles such as the New American Standard Bible and the English Standard Version fail only on first count. They are literal translations of the wrong Greek text!

The dynamic equivalency method of Bible translation is relatively new. It was developed a few decades ago and has spread rapidly within the circles of translation scholars. While working as a foreign missionary in South Asia in the 1980s, I was involved in establishing the principles and guidelines for a Bible translation project. I also had contact with men working on translations in several other languages. Through these experiences I became familiar with dynamic equivalency, and the more I have learned of this method and its growing influence, the more alarmed I have become.

The new method of Bible translation is also called "common language translation," "idiomatic translation," "impact translation," "indirect transfer translation," "functional equivalency," and "thought translation." While some would make a distinction between some of these methods, in a practical sense they are synonyms.

THE POPULARITY AND INFLUENCE OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY

Some will be surprised to learn that the dynamic equivalency method of Bible translation has gained almost total ascendancy among the world's most influential translation groups.

The UNITED BIBLE SOCIETIES (UBS), composed of 137 national and local Bible societies working in 200 countries, distributes a large percentage of the world's Bibles. They are currently involved in translation in 600 languages. In 2002, the UBS distributed 25 million Bibles, 22 million New Testaments, and 531 million Scripture portions. The UBS has been dedicated to dynamic equivalency since the 1970s. The American Bible Society, which pays a large percentage of the United Bible Societies' budget, owns the copyright to the Today's English Version and to the Contemporary English Version. These thoroughgoing dynamic equivalency versions are their babies.

The United Bible Societies are busy producing Today's English Version-like translations throughout the world. In the United Bible Societies publication *Bible Translator,* #23 for 1972, Paul Ellingworth observed, "Since Bible Societies never have enough money for everything, this means that it is unlikely that they will in the future [provide financial] support for translations in 'traditional ecclesiastical language" (p. 223). In August 1987 I received a letter from British and Foreign Bible Society leader Geoff Horner. He wrote, "...virtually all translations being carried out at present directly by UBS are CLT's [common language translations]." At its 1996 World Assembly, the United Bible Societies set a goal that by 2010 a dynamic equivalency Bible should be available for every language with more than 500,000 speakers, a dynamic equivalency New Testament for every language with more than 250,000 speakers, and a dynamic equivalency Bible Portion for every language with more than 100,000 speakers.

The worldwide distribution of the LIVING BIBLE in English and other languages also illustrates the influence of dynamic equivalency. As of 1997, more than 40 million copies of the Living Bible had been sold in the United States and Canada alone. Its coffers full through the sale of English Living Bibles, Living Bibles International dedicated its vast resources to the production of the equivalent of the Living Bible in non-English languages. By the early 1990s, Living Bibles

International had produced the equivalent of the Living Bible in most major languages of the world.

The large resources of WYCLIFFE BIBLE TRANSLATORS is also devoted to the production of dynamic equivalency versions. This is the method they teach at their schools and the method their workers are using on the fields. Wycliffe supports the Today's English Version and the dynamic equivalency methods underlying it.

How influential is Wycliffe? As of the end of 2002, Wycliffe was involved in some 1,500 translation projects in 70 countries. This represents a massive influence, but Wycliffe's influence is spread much further than their own translation work indicates. They are responsible for much of the training of professional Bible translators from other groups, including those with the United Bible Societies, those with denominational translation projects, even some fundamentalists. This vast influence is gained through their Summer Institute of Linguistics training school in Texas and the various programs associated with it.

In addition, some Wycliffe people have written training materials used broadly by professional translators. For example, John Beekman and John Callow, both with Wycliffe, have authored materials which present classic dynamic equivalency methods and which are used widely by professional translators across all denominational and doctrinal lines.

Through these materials, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and the translation labors of their workers, Wycliffe's influence is massive, and it is dedicated to the promotion of dynamic equivalency.

In English, popular dynamic equivalency versions include the New International Version, the Today's English Version (Good News for Modern Man), the Living Bible and the New Living Bible, the Simple English Bible, the Contemporary English Version, and The Message.

Thus since its rise in the 1960s, dynamic equivalency has become the chief Bible translation methodology throughout the world.

THE PRINCIPLES AND ERRORS OF DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY

Following are some of the key principles of dynamic equivalency. These are taken directly from the writings of its chief promoters.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY AIMS TO TRANSLATE THOUGHTS RATHER THAN WORDS

A cornerstone of dynamic equivalency is its goal of translating ideas rather than words. Eugene Nida said that "words are merely vehicles for ideas" (Nida, *Bible Translation*, 1947, p. 12).

Kenneth Taylor said the same thing when he described his translation method:

> "We take THE ORIGINAL THOUGHT and convert it into the language of today. ... We can be much more accurate than the verbal translation" (Interview with J.L. Fear, *Evangelism Today*, December 1972).

Consider this description of the Contemporary English Version:

> "The Contemporary English Version differs from other translations in that it is not a word-for-word and sequence-by-sequence rendering which reproduces the syntax of the original texts," explained Dr. Burke. "Instead, it is an IDEA-BY-IDEA TRANSLATION, arranging the Bible's text in ways understandable to today's reader of English" (American Bible Society *Record*, June-July 1991, pp. 3-6).

Those who use dynamic equivalency claim to be aiming for a transfer of the same MEANING from the original to the receptor language. They say the original words and form are important, but only as a vehicle for the meaning; therefore, it is the meaning alone which is truly important in the translation.

It is true that the meaning of the original Scripture is important, but it is not true that one can translate only the "meaning" without concern for the words and form of the original.

Further, when we examine the dynamic equivalency or common language versions, invariably it is seen that the meaning has been changed as well as the form and words. It is impossible to translate exact meaning without striving to translate exact words

and form.

A study of such popular English dynamic equivalency versions as the Good News Bible and the Living Bible proves this. Not only have the translators of these versions loosed themselves from the words and form of the original texts, but they have loosed themselves from the very meaning as well. Please keep this in mind when you read statements by these translators. They usually profess to remain faithful to the exact meaning of the original text in translation work, but it is impossible to be true to the Word of God while being faithful to dynamic equivalency.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY AIMS AT THE USE OF SIMPLE LANGUAGE AND STYLE THROUGHOUT

In 1970 the Bible Society of India (a member of the United Bible Societies) began to produce a dynamic equivalency version (otherwise known as a "common language version") of the Punjabi Bible. This project was completed in 1984. A listing of the translation principles was given in the report issued upon the release of the New Punjabi Bible, March 2, 1985. One of those principles was this: "From the language point of view, IT SHOULD NOT HAVE A VERY HIGH LITERARY STANDARD. The language used should be within the reach of both the highly educated as well as the less educated people" (*The North India Churchman*, The Church of North India, June 1985, p. 10).

By the Word is a report by missionary Lynn A. Silvernale on the Bengali Common Language Bible. This was a project of the Association of Baptists for World Evangelism, and Silvernale was in charge of the work beginning in 1966. In her report, Silvernale gives one of the principles followed in this translation:

> "Since the literacy rate in Bangladesh was only twenty-one percent when we began the translation, and since that figure included many people who are barely literate and many new readers, WE FELT THAT OUR LANGUAGE LEVEL WOULD HAVE TO BE THAT WHICH IS READILY UNDERSTOOD BY ADULTS WHO HAVE STUDIED IN GRADE FOUR OR FIVE. This level would be understandable to illiterate people hearing it read as well as to people who are able to read but have limited education" (Lynn A. Silvernale, *By the Word*, pp. 25,26).

A practical look at just how simple dynamic equivalency versions are in their literary

style can be seen in this illustration regarding the Dutch Living Bible:

> "We met our Dutch coordinator, Berno Ramaker and his wife Ruth. They are currently testing portions of our soon-to-be released Dutch Living Bible. School groups are being quizzed on four different Bible translations, including the Living Bible, to make sure our edition communicates effectively. ... The book of Genesis was produced in an attractive format last year as a promotion tool for the complete Bible. Acceptance has been enthusiastic. Even before Genesis was released, the 13-year-old son of a reviewer on the project found the manuscript on his father's desk. After reading for awhile, he went to his father and said, "Hey, Dad, I read this manuscript and for the first time I can understand a book of the Bible from the first verse to the last!" (*Thought for Thought*, Living Bibles International, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1985, p. 3).

Note that the translators of this dynamic equivalency version in Dutch tested its value by the attitude of young readers. It was aimed at the level of an eight- to twelve-year-old child and was tested by school groups. Nothing is said about whether these young people were saved or had any spiritual discernment whatsoever. How unreasonable to test the trustworthiness of a Bible version by the reaction of spiritually undiscerning youth!

It might seem wonderful that a 13-year-old boy could read Genesis through and understand it, but consider what this means. The Bible is filled with things that are difficult to understand even for the most mature pastor. How then is it possible for a 13-year-old to understand it perfectly? It was possible only because the Dutch Living Bible has been simplified far beyond the form and meaning of the original text.

Yes, the dynamic equivalency versions are easy to read and understand, as easy as the morning newspaper. But how many times does an individual read his morning newspaper? How closely does an individual ponder every word of the morning newspaper? The fact is that the Bible is NOT the a newspaper! Simplicity is wonderful, but this is not the primary goal of Bible translation. The first and foremost goal is faithfulness to God's holy, eternal Words. ABWE missionary Lynn Silvernale's goal of producing a Bible on the language level of the barely literate people of Bangladesh sounds like a wonderful goal. Since we, too, are missionaries in an Asian country, among a people even less literate than those of Bangladesh, we readily sympathize with Silvernale's desire to produce a Bible which the average reader can understand. The problem is this: The Bible is God's Word, written in

words chosen by God, in a literary form chosen by God. And by and large the original words and form of the Bible simply are not on a grade four reading level! For a translator to produce such a Bible necessitates drastically changing God's Word from its original.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY AIMS TO MAKE THE BIBLE ENTIRELY UNDERSTANDABLE TO NON-CHRISTIANS

Again we quote from the principles which were used by the Bible Society of India in the New Punjabi Bible: "It should be such that readers other than Christians also could understand without any difficulty" (*The North India Churchman*, June 1985, p. 10).

Our answer to this is simple. God has not given us authority to change His Word, regardless of the motivation.

> "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book" (Rev. 22:18,19).

> "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5,6).

Dynamic equivalency confuses the job of the translator with that of a teacher. The translator's job is to produce the most accurate translation possible into the receptor language. It is then the teacher's job to explain the Scriptures.

It is the evangelist's job to explain the Bible through preaching, personal witnessing, Gospel literature, etc.—not to dilute the Scripture so it reads like the morning newspaper, a popular novel, or a children's story book.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY AVOIDS TRADITIONAL ECCLESIASTICAL TERMS

Again we quote from the principles which were used by the Bible Society of India in producing the New Punjabi Bible: "In this translation the traditional language should be avoided" (*The North India Churchman*, June 1985, p. 10).

It is this principle which has resulted in the Today's English Version's obliteration of such "churchy" terms as "justification," "sanctification," "saint," "redemption," and "propitiation," "elder," "deacon" and "bishop." Such terms have been changed to ones which even the unsaved can understand, even when this has meant seriously changing or weakening the meaning.

The Contemporary English Version is one of the most recently completed dynamic equivalency versions, and its translation of the above words illustrates this trend. Consider the following examples from this version:

> Rev. 22:21—"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all" (KJV) becomes "I pray that the Lord Jesus will be kind to all of you" (CEV). (The term "grace" means free unmerited favor and blessing" and it carries a lot of rich theological meaning when it is studied in the various contexts. To change this blessed Bible word to "kindness" is to dilute the Word of God and change its meaning.)
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> Eph. 2:8—"For by grace are ye saved through faith" (KJV) becomes "You were saved by faith in God's kindness" (CEV). (Again, "grace" is changed to "kindness." The dynamic equivalency translators have also changed almost everything else in this important verse.)
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> Phil. 1:1—"with the bishops and deacons" (KJV) becomes "to all of your church officials and officers" (CEV). (The terms "bishop" and "deacon" are technical and important terms that are used consistently in Scripture. To water these terms down to the vague "church officials and officers" is inexcusable.)
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> Phil. 1:1—"the saints in Christ" (KJV) becomes "all of God's people who belong to Christ Jesus" (CEV). (The term "saint" means *one who is set apart for God, one who is holy*; it is from the same Greek words that are translated "holy" and "sanctify." The term has a great depth of meaning when it is studied in the various contexts, but the dynamic equivalency translators typically choose one of the weakest definitions and replace the choice theological word with that definition.)

Rom. 3:10—"none righteous" (KJV) becomes "none acceptable to God" (CEV). (The term "righteous" means right living, godliness; by changing it to "acceptable," the meaning is diluted and changed. It is true that sinners are not acceptable to God, but that is not what this verse says. The dynamic equivalency translators have interpreted the verse and given the readers their interpretation rather than a precise translation.)

Rom. 3:24—"being justified freely" (KJV) becomes "he freely accepts us" (CEV). (The term "justification" means *declared righteous*.")

1 Cor. 6:11—"but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (KJV) becomes "But now the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and the power of God's Spirit have washed you and made you acceptable to God" (CEV). (In this verse, in addition to many other changes, the glorious Bible terms "sanctified" and "justified" have been watered down to "made acceptable to God.")

Consider some further examples which are given in *Bible Translations for Popular Use* by William L. Wonderly. This book was published by the United Bible Societies and is a standard work on dynamic equivalency methods.

In Jn. 1:14 "full of grace and truth" becomes "full of love and truth" in the Spanish CL version. (Do we have to point out that love is not the same as grace?)

The "grace did much more abound" of Rom. 5:20 becomes "the kindness of God was very much greater" in the Spanish CL version. (Again, "grace" means more than the mere "kindness of God.")

In Rom. 1:5 "By whom we have received grace and apostleship" becomes "God has given us the privilege of being sent" in the Spanish CL version. (This "translation" is so different from the original that it is almost unrecognizable.)

In 2 Cor. 8:6 "this same grace also" becomes "this kind offering" in the Spanish CL version.

In Gal. 2:9 "perceived the grace that was given unto me" becomes "recognized that God had given me this special task" in the TEV.

In Acts 13:39 "by him all that believe are justified from all things" becomes "by means of him that all those who believe are forgiven of all" in the Spanish CL version. (The term "justified" means more than merely "being forgiven.")

The problem here is two-fold: First, the terms chosen to replace the original Bible words do not sufficiently communicate the exact meaning of the original. *Saints* means more than those who belong to God. *Grace* means more than kindness, or favor, or privilege. *Justification* means more than forgiven. Secondly, the entire idea that these terms are ecclesiastical, or churchy, is erroneous. They are the terms by which God chose to communicate the Truth. They are heavenly terms, and have only become known as church terms because they were given to the churches and are held to be precious by God's people. To change them and water them down is a great evil.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY ADAPTS THE TRANSLATION TO THE CULTURE OF THE RECEPTOR PEOPLE

In describing the dynamic equivalency theories of Eugene Nida, Jakob Van Bruggen notes the emphasis on adapting the message of the Scriptures to the culture of the people:

> "According to the advocates of dynamic equivalence, real communication is broken when the difference between biblical and modern culture is not considered. Nida writes, 'Similarly, in the biblical account, the holy kiss, the wearing of veils, women speaking in the church, and wrestling with an angel all have different meanings than in our own culture' (E. Nida, *Message and Missions*, p. 41). According to Nida, Jacob's struggle with the angel is being interpreted psychoanalytically or mythologically (E. Nida, *Message and Mission*, pp. 41-42). He considers the cultural pattern so dominant that the translation should never be a mere transmitter of the words of the message. There is no formal equivalence between the original message and the translated message. What is needed is not a static equivalency but a dynamic equivalency" (Jakob Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1978, p. 70).

This thinking has led to all sorts of changes in the Word of God. Those who promote dynamic equivalency almost always emphasize that they aim to be perfectly faithful to the meaning of the original text. But this simply cannot be done when dynamic

equivalency methodology is used. THOUGH DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY PROPONENTS CLAIM TO HONOR THE MEANING OF THE BIBLE TEXT, IN PRACTICE THEY DO NOT! IN PRACTICE THEY CHANGE, TWIST, AND PERVERT SCRIPTURE. I know this is hard language, folks, but it is true and it needs to be said. The Bible is serious business.

A man working on the translation of a dynamic equivalency version of the Bible into a tribal language spoken in northeast India has reasoned as follows: This tribe has never sacrificed lambs, but they have sacrificed roosters (cocks) to their gods in days past. Therefore, we must translate John's testimony as follows: "Behold the Cock of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Evangelist Maken Sanglir of Nagaland gave us this illustration of Bible translation work in northeast India.

Another example of adapting the Bible's language to today's cultural situations was related to me by the head of the Bible Society in Nepal. He told of one of the projects of the United Bible Societies which was done in a part of the world in which the people had not seen snow. The translators, therefore, decided to translate Isaiah 1:18—"...though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as the inside of a coconut..." Is the inside of a coconut the same as snow? Both are white, but there the similarity stops. Snow is like God's forgiveness not only in that it is white but also in the way it covers and in its loveliness and probably in many other aspects. Even slight changes in God's Word can have significant consequences in loss of meaning or even in imparting the wrong meaning.

In a United Bible Societies translation in the Ulithian language of the South Pacific, "dove" was changed to a local bird called a gigi ("Mog Mog and the Fig Tree," *Record*, Nov. 1987, pp. 6-7).

Further examples of this are given in *Translating the Word of God* by John Beekman and John Callow, of Wycliffe Bible Translators:

Matt. 8:20—"foxes" was translated "coyotes" in the Mazahua language of Mexico.

Mark 4:21—"on a candlestick" was translated "on a grain bin" in the Korku language of India.

Lk. 9:62—"plough" was translated "hoe" in the Carib language of Central America.

Lk. 12:24—"storehouse" was translated "basket" in the Villa Alta Zapotec language of Mexico.

Matt. 20:22—"the cup" was translated "pain" in the Copainala Zoque of Mexico.

Matt. 10:34—"a sword" was translated "there will be dissension among the people" in the Mazahua language of Mexico.

The Zapotec translation of Mexico changed "the babe leaped in her womb" of Luke 1:41 to "the baby played."

Consider some other examples of the way these versions change the Word of God to conform with culture. The following illustrations were given to us by Ross Hodsdon of Bibles International, formerly with Wycliffe:

In a translation for Eskimos in Alaska, "lamb" was replaced with "seal pup."

In a translation in the Makusi language of Brazil, "son of man" was replaced with "older brother."

In another Wycliffe translation "fig tree" was replaced with "banana tree."

We believe this type of thing is wrong. When one departs from the principle of a literal translation, the mind of the translator and the culture and understanding of the people become the authority rather than the actual words of Scriptures.

It is important to emphasize that we are not talking about a wooden literalness, but about an unwavering commitment to the actual wording of the Bible text.

From these few examples, you see how far-removed the "dynamic equivalency" rendering can be from the original text. Dynamic equivalency allows translators this strange liberty to change, delete from, and add to the Word of God to such an extent that it no longer even can be called the Word of God.

It is easy to see the unreasonable ends of this dynamic equivalency principle. Those using dynamic equivalency are not afraid to change God's Words in order to relate to modern cultures.

We must remember that God is the Author of History. He made the nations and "hath

determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation" (Acts 17:26). The prophet Daniel knew this, as he testified, "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever: for wisdom and might are his: And he changeth the times and the seasons: he removeth kings, and setteth up kings: he giveth wisdom unto the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding" (Dan. 2:20-21).

God was not caught off guard when the Scriptures were given in a certain period of history to a certain people within a certain culture. God had before ordained that His Word be delivered through the very cultural and historical situations in which it was given. God created the Hebrew and Greek languages as vehicles for the transmission of His eternal Word to man. Further, God created the nation Israel through which to deliver the Old Testament Scriptures, and God created the Roman empire into which Jesus Christ came to be the atonement for man's sin, and God created the church through which to communicate the mysteries of the New Testament Scriptures. *Therefore, the cultural terminology of the Bible is not incidental to the communication of God's Word; it is essential for such communication.*

The cultural terminology of the Bible, such as that pertaining to farming and slavery, is to be translated carefully from the original, then explained by evangelists and preachers. It is not the job of the Bible translator to become in the process of his work as a translator the evangelist and preacher. Of course the translator can add explanatory footnotes if he so desires and in this way give definitions of the words used in the new version. He can also make dictionaries and commentaries to be used in conjunction with his Bible translation. This is certainly wiser than taking the liberty of changing God's Word, and it has been the method followed by godly translators of old.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY ASSUMES THAT THE BIBLE WAS WRITTEN IN LANGUAGE EASILY UNDERSTOOD BY THE PEOPLE THEN LIVING

This principle is an important basic assumption underlying the theory of dynamic equivalency. Consider this as stated by ABWE missionary Lynn Silvernale:

> "The spiritual truth of Scripture was originally written in clear natural language which was intelligible to its readers. Its language conformed to the idiomatic usage of the native speakers of the time in which it was written. However, the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit was necessary to enable the original readers to grasp that spiritual truth, because spiritual truth must be spiritually

> discerned. When people today read a translation of the Bible, the only barrier they should have to encounter is the spiritual one, not a linguistic one which stems from the use of unnatural and difficult language" (Silvernale, pp. 36,37).

Silvernale is merely restating something she learned from one of the chief promoters of dynamic equivalency—John Beekman, translation coordinator with Wycliffe Bible Translators. In *Translating the Word of God*, a book co-authored by Beekman and John Callow, we read this basic assumption: "The naturalness of the translation and the ease with which it is understood should be comparable to the naturalness of the original and to the ease with which the recipients of the original documents understood them" (p. 34).

Jakob Van Bruggen tells us that "Beekman and Callow simply presuppose that the linguistic form of the original was natural and not difficult. They write that Paul, Peter, John, James, Luke and the others wrote clearly and were readily understood by their first-century readers" (Jakob Van Bruggen *The Future of the Bible,* p. 111).

Let us return to Silvernale's statement, and upon closer investigation it will be seen that it is a subtle mixture of truth and error. It is not completely true that the "Scripture was originally written in clear natural language which was intelligible to its readers," nor that "its language conformed to the idiomatic usage of the native speakers of the time in which it was written."

Even the writers of the Bible themselves did not always understand what they were speaking! This is stated in 1 Peter 1:10-11.

The Apostle Peter acknowledged that some of the writings of Paul were "hard to be understood" (2 Pet. 3:16).

Even the widely held supposition that Jesus spoke in parables to make his teachings simple and clear for unbelievers is not true. The parables of the Lord Jesus Christ had a two-fold purpose—to reveal truth to believers and to hide truth from unbelievers! "Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given.... Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand" (Matt. 13:10-13).

It is simply not true that the original Scripture was clear to the native speakers of its

day.

It is also not true that all of the idioms of the original writings were those of the native speakers at the time of writing. The Law of Moses, with its tabernacle, priesthood, and sacrifices, was given by revelation from God on Mt. Sinai and much of it was completely foreign even to the Israelites at the time of its reception. These were "patterns of things in heaven" (Heb. 9:23). The details relating to the Law, the priesthood, and the tabernacle and its service were not adapted to Israel's culture; Israel's culture was molded and created by that Revelation!

The same is true for many other parts of Scripture. The teaching about the church in the New Testament is described as "mysteries," which means new revelation from heaven. The people of the first century knew no more about New Testament salvation, propitiation, justification, sanctification, baptism, the Lord's Supper, or any other church term and service than people of the world do today. They had to learn the meaning of these foreign, heavenly things after they were saved, just as men do now. Even common words used by the apostles under inspiration of the Holy Spirit are often given new meanings when they are used in Scripture than they had in everyday life.

These Bible things are foreign to all earthly cultures, because earthly cultures were formed by rebellious men who have turned from the truth and from the Living God. Truth has been lost from man's cultures and only exists in the form of unperceived shadows remaining in the dark mists of manmade religions. It is not surprising that much of the Bible is obscure to the people of this world, for "our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). And again, "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness" (1 John 5:19). Again, Jesus said of Christians, "...they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14, 16).

The Bible has great variety of style and doctrine—some simple enough for children to understand, some difficult even for the most educated adult; some simple enough for the unsaved to grasp, some difficult even for the most mature saint. First year Greek students soon learn that the language style of the New Testament holds great variety. Many first year Greek students can translate portions of the Gospel of John with considerable accuracy, while to the same students Paul's epistles remain mostly obscure because of the greater difficulty in language style and content.

Man is not free to simplify that which God has not simplified! The translator who produces a version of the Bible in which the Pauline epistles is as easy to read as the Gospel of John has corrupted God's Word. I know that such an idea sounds like heresy to a follower of dynamic equivalency. Many ask, Isn't it always good to make the Bible simple enough for people to understand? I say no, not if in so doing we have changed God's Holy Word! Who is man to make simple that which God did not make simple? The Bible is God's Book. Does any fallen man know better than God what man needs to hear?

Contrast today's thinking among Bible translators with that of faithful William Tyndale of old, who first translated the English Bible from Greek and Hebrew: "I call God to record against the day we shall appear before our Lord Jesus, to give a reckoning of our doings, that I never altered one syllable of God's Word against my conscience, nor would [I so alter it] this day, if all that is in the earth, whether it be pleasure, honour, or riches, might be given me."

WHY WE REJECT DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY

Beyond what we have already seen, following are some of the major errors of the dynamic equivalency method of Bible translation:

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY WAS CREATED BY A FALSE TEACHER

It is impossible that the theories of dynamic equivalency could be right and scriptural for the simple fact that they were devised by a false teacher. His name is Eugene Nida. Ray Van Leeuwen observes, "... if you read a Bible translated in the last half-century, you probably read a Bible influenced by Nida" ("We Really Do Need Another Bible Translation," *Christianity Today*, Oct. 22, 2001, p. 29).

Eugene Nida was the Executive Secretary of the Translations Department of the American Bible Society from 1946 to 1980. Since his retirement, he has been retained as a Special Consultant for Translations. He traveled to more than 85 countries and conferred on translation work in more than 200 different languages. He has

influenced countless Bible translators through his writings. Nida believes the Scriptures were "imperfect" and that God's revelation was not "absolute truth," even in the originals (Nida, *Message and Mission*, 1960 pp. 221-222, 224-228). He says that the words of Scripture "are in a sense nothing in and of themselves" (Nida, *Message and Mission*, p. 225). He denies the view that the Scriptures were written "in a kind of Holy Ghost language" (Nida, *Language Structure and Translation*, 1975, p. 259). Nida claims that the Bible is limited and relative (Nida, *Customs and Cultures*, 1954, p. 282, f. 22). Nida agrees with the modernists who claim that Christ's blood was not an actual offering for sin but was merely a "figure of the cost" (Nida, *Theory and Practice*, 1969, p. 53, n. 19). Nida also claims that Christ's blood was merely symbolic of "violent death" and that it was not a propitiatory offering to God for sin (Nida and Newman, *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to Romans*, on Rom. 3:25). Nida has worked closely with Robert Bratcher, who wickedly changed the word "blood" to "death" in the Today's English Version.

Further, dynamic equivalency's largest promoters are the apostate United Bible Societies, which are filled with theological modernists and which are closely yoked together with the Roman Catholic Church. (For evidence of the apostasy of the UBS, order the author's book *Unholy Hands on God's Holy Book: A Report on the United Bible Societies*, available from Way of Life Literature.)

God has given clear commands about our relationship with heresy. See, for example, Rom. 16:17; Titus 3:9-10; 2 Tim. 2:16-21; and 2 Tim. 3:5.

Friends, God would not give us important truth through heretics! If you want to know how to translate the Bible properly, don't go to the writings of men such as Eugene Nida and Robert Bratcher! God commands that His people mark and avoid the heresy of dynamic equivalency and those who are promoting it!

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY DENIES THE NATURE OF THE BIBLE

First, the Bible is Revelation from heaven. See Gal. 1:11-12; 2 Pet. 1:21. Examples: Moses (Num. 16:28), David (2 Sam. 23:2), Nehemiah (Neh. 9:30), and the Prophets (Jer. 1:9; 30:2; 36:2; Ezek. 1:3; Acts 3:21). God delivered the Bible message as Revelation from heaven and it must be treated as such. It's God's' Book, not mans. Even the very culture in which the Bible was given was chosen of God and is an integral part of His Revelation.

Second, the Bible is verbally inspired. See 1 Cor. 2:12-13; Matt. 5:18; Acts 1:16. This means that the words and details of Scripture are as important as its meaning. The writers of the Bible were not simply given general ideas and then left to their own resources in phrasing them. The words and forms by which the message was communicated were settled in heaven from all eternity, purified seven times. Though no one would deny that in translating the Bible there must be some freedom to change the form of the original in order to properly communicate the message of the original, such freedom definitely does not extend to the liberties taken in dynamic equivalency translations.

Third, the Bible contains the deep things of God. Bible language is sufficient to communicate eternal and divine Truth. "But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Cor. 2:10). Bible language cannot be compared with any of the uninspired writings of man. This is Divine Revelation and contains very Truth without admixture.

There are those who use dynamic equivalency and yet profess to believe the doctrine of the Scriptures we have described briefly in the above study. I find this very strange. The theory of dynamic equivalency was built by men who do not hold a high view of Scripture. When one considers the very nature of Scripture, it becomes impossible to make the kind of changes that dynamic equivalency calls for.

"When the Bible is being translated, its own doctrine as to its verbal inspiration imposes limitations on the translator's function. The Scripture teaches us that, as God's word written, its form as well as its thought is inspired. The translator of Scripture has, therefore, above all else, to *follow* the text: it is not his business to interpret it or to explain it" (Ian Murray, "Which Version? A Continuing Debate," in *The New Testament Student and Bible Translation*, ed. John H. Skilton, 1978, p. 132).

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY IGNORES GOD'S WARNINGS ABOUT ADDING TO OR TAKING AWAY FROM GOD'S WORD

Consider the following Scriptures: Rev. 22:18-19; Prov. 30:5-6; Jer. 26:2; Deut. 4:2; Ezek. 3:10-11.

Those who follow dynamic equivalency acknowledge these warnings and often have

clever ways of explaining how their paraphrases do not disobey them. But in the end it is clear that the warnings are simply ignored.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY SUBSTITUTES MAN'S THOUGHTS FOR GOD'S WORDS

The dynamic equivalency translator makes many changes to the Scriptures. He simplifies the words, removes "theological terminology," changes concrete images into abstractions, removes and interprets images and figures of speech, adds explanatory material, changes the verbs, shortens the sentences, etc.

We will repeat some of the examples of this:

Rom. 3:25—"blood" (KJV) becomes "death" (TEV).

Isaiah 1:18—"Snow" (KJV) becomes "Coconut" (United Bible Societies translation).

James 1:17—"the Father of lights" (KJV) becomes "God, the Creator of the heavenly lights" (TEV).

Eph. 1:17—"the Father of glory" (KJV) becomes "the glorious Father" (TEV).

"Lamb" becomes "seal pup" (Wycliffe translation in Eskimo).

"Fig tree" becomes "banana tree" (Wycliffe translation).

This type of thing is wrong. When one departs from the principle of a literal translation, the mind of the translator and the culture and understanding of the people become the authority rather than the actual words of Scriptures.

It is important to emphasize that we are not arguing for a wooden literalness, but for an unwavering commitment to the actual wording of the Bible text.

From these few examples, we see how far-removed the "dynamic equivalency" rendering is from the original text.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY ROBS MEN OF GOD'S WORDS

Consider the following Scriptures which show the importance of each word of the Bible: Luke 4:4; Matt. 22:45; Gal. 3:16; Jn. 10:34. Yet dynamic equivalency leaves the readers without access to the very words of God. They have the general thoughts of the original in some cases, but the very words and exact and full meaning have been stolen from them! The reader of the dynamic equivalency versions cannot meditate over each word and detail of Scripture because he does not have an exact translation.

This becomes even more frightful when we consider the fact that dynamic equivalency is not just a technique being used in translations of Bible portions for distribution among the unsaved in evangelistic work. This method of corruption is actually (and rapidly) replacing the earlier concept of literal translation, and new dynamic equivalency versions being produced by the United Bible Societies and others are often intended to REPLACE the old literal versions.

Many of those who use dynamic equivalency think they are helping people by bringing the Word of God down to their level. Actually they are thieves who are dooming people never to have the very words of God.

> "Readers of an English Bible should not be at the mercy of a translation committee's interpretation of a passage. They have a right to make up their own minds regarding what a passage means. Furthermore, a translation should preserve the full exegetical potential of the original text" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 194, 195).

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY CONFUSES SPIRITUAL ENLIGHTENMENT WITH NATURAL UNDERSTANDING

Consider the following Scriptures which teach that man is unable to understand the Word of God apart from divine assistance: 1 Cor. 2:14-16; John 16:8-13; Matt. 13:9-16; Luke 24:44-45; Acts 11:21; 16:14; Prov. 1:23.

Dynamic equivalency fails to recognize the root problem in regard to man's inability to understand the Word of God, which is spiritual blindness and not cultural ignorance or lack of literary education.

We see an example of this in Acts 13:44-48. Here the Jews, in whose cultural setting the Bible was primarily written, rejected the Scriptures, while the idolatrous Gentiles

accepted it. Culture and language were not the problem; rebellion of the heart was the problem. This remains true today.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY CONFUSES TRANSLATION WITH EVANGELISM AND TEACHING

The translator is to faithfully transmit the words and message from the original into the receptor language as literally as possible. In so doing he should obviously attempt to make the translation as plain for the readers AS POSSIBLE without doing damage to the original words and form. The translator is not free to simplify that which God has not simplified. Utter faithfulness to the original text should be the very chiefest concern of the Bible translator.

It is the evangelist's and the teacher's job, then, to explain that message to the people. The Bible translator whose overriding goal is to make the Bible clear to the unsaved of necessity becomes a Bible corrupter.

The Ethiopian eunuch was reading from the Scriptures and could not understand what he read. It was Philip the evangelist's job to explain the Scriptures to this man (Acts 8:26-33). If Philip had believed the theories of dynamic equivalency he might have returned home after this experience and rewritten and simplified the book of Isaiah, the book which the Ethiopian eunuch had been reading! Was it not obvious that the sincere but unsaved Ethiopian had not been able to understand the Bible? Was it not obvious that many other men must be in the same condition as this Ethiopian? Was it not obvious that there are not enough evangelists to speak personally to every lost person and to explain the Bible for them? Well, then, we must reword the Bible and change its difficult, antiquated words (the book of Isaiah was already about 800 years old when the eunuch was reading it) so that the non-Christian can pick it up and "understand it without difficulty." Certainly this would please God. Such is the thinking so commonly held among those who are promoting dynamic equivalency.

But Philip and the early Christian leaders would have had their hands cut off rather than to have tampered with God's holy words. That Book is Holy! Is it really? Is it right to inscribe "Holy Bible" on the cover of this book? Yes, God's name is holy and reverend, we are told in the Scriptures (Psa. 111:9), but we also read that "thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name" (Psa. 138:2)! If God's name is holy and reverend, and God has magnified His Word above all His name, then His Word is

even holier and more reverend than His name! Amazing, but true. Woe unto those who are tampering with this unspeakably Holy Book.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY LOWERS THE BIBLE TO THE PEOPLE INSTEAD OF RAISING THE PEOPLE TO THE BIBLE

Dynamic equivalency is an upside down methodology. Instead of raising the people up to the level of the Bible through education, it seeks to bring the Bible down to the people's natural level of spiritual ignorance.

> "Instead of lowering the Bible to a lowest common denominator, why should we not educate people to rise to the level required to experience the Bible in its full richness and exaltation? Instead of expecting the least from Bible readers, we should expect the most from them. The greatness of the Bible requires the best, not the least. ... The most difficult of modern English translations -- the King James -- is used most by segments of our society that are relatively uneducated as defined by formal education. ... research has shown repeatedly that people are capable of rising to surprising and even amazing abilities to read and master a subject that is important to them. ... if modern readers are less adept at theology than they can and should be, it is the task of the church to educate them, not to give them Bible translations that will permanently deprive them of the theological content that is really present in the Bible." (Kyken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 107, 109).

This is exactly what we say to those who criticize the King James Bible as being too difficult for modern English speakers. The King James Bible does contain a certain level of antiquation, but the problem is not that difficult to overcome. Its vocabulary is much smaller than any of the modern versions. Most of the words are only one or two-syllables. Its phrasing is short and pithy. It is not that difficult to learn what "thee, thou, and thine" mean. It is not that difficult to learn what the 100 or so antiquated words mean, that "quick" means "living," etc. What does it require? Study! And that is exactly what God requires of those who would learn to rightly understand His Word (2 Tim. 2:15).

Instead of translating the Bible so that it sounds like a sixth-grade reader or the morning newspaper, we need to translate it accurately and majestically, and then educate the people so that they can understand it.

We do this by producing Bible study tools, such as dictionaries and commentaries and concordances. There is nothing new about this process. This is exactly what missionaries have been doing for centuries. It is a process that still works very well, and I speak from experience as a missionary.

What about the unsaved, you say? The Bible as a whole was not written for the unsaved. It is the Bible's gospel that was written for the unsaved (Rom. 1:16), and we can make the gospel as simple as necessary for the lost (through personal evangelism, tracts, gospel recordings, radio broadcasts, etc.) without trying to bring the Bible itself down to their level. As we have seen, to translate the Bible so that the unsaved can understand it without help is an absolute impossibility, anyway, because they cannot understand it until they are born again. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Cor. 2:14).

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY CONFUSES INSPIRATION WITH TRANSLATION

The dynamic equivalency theory says the translator should ask, "How would Moses or Paul write if they lived today?" Beekman and Callow develop this thinking in *Translating the Word of God*:

> "The original writings were both natural in structure and meaningful in content. When we say that the Scriptures are natural in form, we are simply saying that, written as they were by native speakers, they fell within the bounds of natural Hebrew, Aramaic, or Koine Greek. The use of words and their combinations; the syntax; the morphology—all was natural. This characteristic of the original should also be found in a translation" (Beekman and Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, p. 40).

Dynamic equivalency teaches translators to ask the question, "What would the Bible writers say if they were speaking today?" This thinking is faulty. It confuses inspiration with translation, authorship with translation. The translator is not receiving Scripture by the process of divine inspiration; he is not authoring the Scripture; he is merely translating the Scripture into another language. The Bible translator's job is to translate exactly that which God has written. His job is not to interpret the original concepts of Scripture, then rephrase those concepts in a general sense in another culture, time, and language. His job is not to change the images of the Bible to adapt them to a modern culture.

Furthermore, not only does the translator not have the authority to modify the Scriptures, he has no way of knowing how the Bible writers would speak if they lived today. The very idea that we could perform such a task is pure fiction.

> "The biblical writers are not writing today. They wrote millennia ago. To picture them as writing in an era when they did not write is to engage in fiction, and it distorts the facts of the situation. ... We do not want a speculative Bible. We need a Bible based on certainty. What is certain is *what the biblical writers did actually say and write*" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 98, 99).

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY ATTEMPTS THE IMPOSSIBLE

We have seen that dynamic equivalency attempts to re-write the Bible for today, which is an impossible task. In several other ways, dynamic equivalency attempts things which are impossible. Let's consider some of these.

For one thing, dynamic equivalency attempts to retain the exact meaning of the original while allowing for great changes in adapting the Bible message to the language and culture of the receptor people. Consider the following statement by United Bible Societies translator Thomas Headland:

> "The goal in Bible translation is to make a translation that will communicate to the target culture without their having to learn the Judeo-Greek culture, while at the same time being faithful to the uniqueness of the historical and theological setting of the Scriptures. No simple task!" (Thomas N. Headland, "Some Communication Problems in Translation," *Notes on Translation*, No. 88, April 1982, p. 28).

Headland says this is no simple task. He is wrong. It is an impossible task! God chose to reveal His Word within the framework of a Judeo-Greek culture, and if you change the Bible to such an extent that the readers can understand it without learning anything about that culture, you have corrupted the Scripture.

At this point we need to note that dynamic equivalency proponents inevitably claim their translations are faithful to the original text. All dynamic equivalency gurus claim this. In the United Bible Societies publication *Bible Translations for Popular Use*, William Wonderly claims dynamic equivalency versions are faithful to the original:

> "In the translations mentioned above [the TEV, Living Bible, Spanish Popular Version, French common version, and the Today's Dutch Version, etc.] various techniques have been used to produce a version that is more meaningful for the readers for whom they are intended, STAYING WITHIN THE LIMITS OF FIDELITY TO THE ORIGINAL ON ONE HAND and the use of an acceptable style on the other" (p. 75).

Wycliffe Translator's publication *Translating the Word of God* by John Beekman and John Callow also claims that the aim of dynamic equivalency is always faithfulness to the original text:

> "The goal should be a translation that is so rich in vocabulary, so idiomatic in phrase, so correct in construction, so smooth in flow of thought, so clear in meaning, and so elegant in style, that it does not appear to be a translation at all, and yet, AT THE SAME TIME, FAITHFULLY TRANSMITS THE MESSAGE OF THE ORIGINAL" (p. 32).

The Today's English Version claims this:

> "The Bible in Today's English Version is a new translation WHICH SEEKS TO STATE CLEARLY AND ACCURATELY THE MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL TEXTS in words and forms that are widely accepted by all people who use English as a means of communication" (Foreword, *Holy Bible Today's English Version with Deuterocanonicals/Apocrypha*, American Bible Society, 1978).

The Contemporary English Version claims this:

> "Every attempt has been made to produce a text THAT IS FAITHFUL TO THE MEANING OF THE ORIGINAL and that can be read with ease and understanding by readers of all ages" ("Translating the Contemporary English Version," *Bible for Today's Family New Testament*, American Bible Society, 1991).

Ken Taylor, translator of the Living Bible, claims this:

> "We take the original thought and convert it into the language of today. IN THIS WAY WE CAN BE MUCH MORE ACCURATE THAN THE VERBAL TRANSLATION" (*Evangelism Today*, Dec. 1972).

It should be obvious that such claims do not mean anything! We have seen examples

from these versions, showing that they are anything but faithful. Even the general meaning of the original is changed. I don't care what a translator claims. If his translation is a perversion of God's Word, I will not allow him to hide behind his claim that he is faithful to the Bible!

Let's consider a second impossibility of dynamic equivalency. It says translators can know how hearers of the Bible centuries ago were impressed. One of the goals of dynamic equivalency is to attempt to reproduce the same reaction in modern hearers of their versions. This is called impact translating.

How utterly impossible! We cannot know how men centuries ago were impressed by the Word of God spoken to them.

Further, there have always been different reactions to that same Word by the different hearers. A glimpse of this is seen in Acts 17, following Paul's message to the Athenians. All heard the same message from God that day, but some mocked, some decided to put off a decision until a later date, and some believed (Acts 17:32-33).

The Bible translator's job is not to attempt to create a certain reaction in the hearer of the Bible, but to concentrate upon making a faithful rendering of God's Holy eternal Words. The translator's mind is to be most especially upon the receptor language, not the receptor individuals. When the translation is completed and the preaching begins, men will respond in the various ways they have always responded to God's Word—some mocking, some ignoring and putting it off, some believing.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY IS BASED ON HALF-TRUTHS

Like all error, dynamic equivalency is based on many half truths. The writings of dynamic equivalency proponents contain many things with which we agree, yet they go beyond the truth. Consider some of the half-truths of dynamic equivalency:

First, dynamic equivalency says an overly literal translation is not correct. Those who promote dynamic equivalency inevitably begin by giving examples of wildly improper translations and using these as justification for their paraphrasing methodology. Eugene Nida does this in *Every Man in His Own Language*:

> "Literal translations—the easiest and the most dangerous—are the source of many mistakes. The missionary in Latin America who constantly used the

> phrase 'it came to pass' scarcely realized that it only meant to the people, 'something came in order to pass there.' ... literally the story of Mary 'sitting at the feet of Jesus,' only to discover later that what they had said really described Mary as 'on Jesus' lap.' It is one thing to speak of 'heaping coals of fire on one's head' if one is talking to an English-speaking congregation; but if one speaks that way in some parts of Africa, he can be badly misunderstood, for that is one method of torture and killing" (Eugene A. Nida, *God's Word in Man's Language*, Harper and Brothers, 1952, p. 17).

This is a straw man to draw attention away from the improper liberties dynamic equivalency proponents take with the Word of God. The solution to a woodenly literal translation is not dynamic equivalency, but a reasonable, spiritual translation which seeks to be true to the original words and form and which does not take the frightful liberties of dynamic equivalency, but is willing to let the Word of God say what it says rather than change it—even for the sake of simplification. The proper Bible translation methodology has been called an "*essentially* literal translation" and a "formal equivalence translation" as opposed to dynamic equivalency.

Second, dynamic equivalency says the translator must interpret. This is true! An example is Isaiah 7:14 where it is arguably possible to translate the Hebrew word "almah" either as "young woman" or as "virgin." The Christ-honoring, Bible-believing translator will always choose *virgin* because he knows that the verse is a Messianic prophecy of Christ's virgin birth. This is the result of interpretation. Here is another example. In the Nepali language there is no generic term for wine as there is in Greek and Hebrew. The translator, therefore, must interpret passages such as John 2 when he is selecting a Nepali word for wine. He must translate it "grape juice" or "strong drink," etc., depending upon the context.

All translators face this, but the fact that a translator must interpret things in Scripture before they are translated does not justify the extreme liberties which are being taken in dynamic equivalency versions.

Furthermore, there is a vast difference between the necessity of interpreting *words* and that of interpreting *passages*. Consider the following from Leland Ryken, professor of English at Wheaton College:

> "Whenever a translator decides that a given English word best captures the meaning of a word in the original text, the decision implies an interpretation.

> But there is a crucial difference between *linguistic* interpretation (decisions regarding what English words best express Hebrew or Greek words) and *thematic* interpretation of the meaning of a text. Failure to distinguish between these two types of interpretation has led to both confusion and license in translation. ... It is time to call a moratorium on the misleading and ultimately false claim that all translation is interpretation. For essentially literal translations, translation is translation, and its task is to express what the original *says*. Only for dynamic equivalent translations is all translation potentially interpretation--something added to the original or changed from the original to produce what *the translators think the passage means*" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*, 2002, pp. 85, 89).

Third, dynamic equivalency says that the people for whom the translation is being made must be kept in mind. Again, this is true. Every translator must have the people in mind for whom he is translating, but it does not mean we can change *fig tree* to banana tree or *blood* to death or *grace* to kindness or *saints* to people of God or *pastors* to church officials!

Fourth, dynamic equivalency says some things implicit must be made explicit. This is true. For instance, sometimes words must be added in the translation to make a passage intelligible and/or to bring out words implicit in the original. An example of this is the words which appear in italic in the King James Version. These are words which were added by the translators but which are not explicitly in the original texts. This type of this is essential in Bible translation work and is something which has always been done. But contrast this important translation principle with the dynamic equivalency perversion of it in the following example from Isaiah 53:1 in the Today's English Version:

> KJV—"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?"
>
> TEV—"The people reply, 'Who would have believed what we report? Who could have seen the Lord's hand in this?'"

The things added and changed in this passage illustrate that dynamic equivalency goes beyond any proper bounds of faithful translating. Upon what authority have the TEV translators added "the people reply" to this passage? Upon what authority have they changed the tenses of the verbs? Upon what authority have they changed "arm

of the Lord" to "the Lord's hand"? Translators who do this type of thing might claim only to be making explicit that which is implicit, but in actuality they are corrupting the Word of God. None of these changes are truly implicit in this verse.

Consider another example. This time we will compare Ephesians 3:-2-4 in the KJV to the Contemporary English Version (CEV):

> KJV—"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward: How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery; (as I wrote afore in few words, Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ."
>
> CEV—"You have surely heard about God's kindness in choosing me to help you. In fact, this letter tells you a little about how God has shown me his mysterious ways. As you read the letter, you will also find out how well I really do understand the mystery about Christ."

We see that the liberties taken by dynamic equivalency translators go beyond any proper bounds of Bible translation. This is true for practically any example we could give from these versions. They simply aren't faithful. Dynamic equivalency proponents won't admit that, but, friends, it's true. Dynamic equivalency (by any name) is a proud new methodology which men of God of old—the William Tyndales and the Adoniram Judsons—would have rejected in trembling and disgust.

Dynamic equivalency is especially dangerous because it is a subtle mixture of truth and error. Many of those who are following this method of translation have accepted the bitter cake of dynamic equivalency because of the sweetness of the truth intermingled therein. The principles can sound so reasonable. But the bottom line is that dynamic equivalency is a perversion of Scripture.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY IS AN IMPROPER ANSWER TO VERY REAL PROBLEMS

Promoters of dynamic equivalency use examples from translation work in undeveloped nations among illiterate people to justify their methodology. Hear missionary translator Lynn Silvernale:

> "How do you talk about sheep to people who have never seen sheep and have

> no word for such an animal? What do you use for 'wine' in a language which has words only for 'grape juice' and 'strong liquor'? How to express theological terms and concepts like 'righteousness,' 'justification,' 'propitiation,' is another big challenge for most translators. In many tribal languages these concepts are foreign and there are no ready-made terms to express them. It has taken some translators months and years to find a suitable term in their language for such abstract ideas as 'love' and 'holiness.' To get an idea of what is involved, try expressing 'propitiation' in the shortest, clearest possible way for a translator to put into a language which doesn't have such a term" (Silvernale, *By the Word*).

The problems so stated can make dynamic equivalency seem right, reasonable. These are problems Bible translators and missionaries have always faced, yet it is only in recent years that the proud concept of dynamic equivalency with its willingness to change the form of God's Word to fit man's culture has been put forth as the solution.

Foreign cultures are not the only problems used to illustrate the supposed need for dynamic equivalency translation. United Bible Societies publications are filled with problems involved in enabling various groups such as children and the homeless to understand the Scriptures.

It's true that there are tremendous problems involved in translating the Bible for foreign cultures and for illiterate or marginally literate peoples. But it is never proper to change the Word of God for the sake of adapting it to another culture. The proper solution is to translate the Bible accurately, then explain the translation with footnotes, dictionaries, and commentaries.

What if a language is just too simple and strange to carry the Scriptures? I say don't translate the Bible into that language! I can hear the groans now from those with a Wycliffe mindset. But who has given man the permission of changing the Word of God? Who has given such permission? God says, "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar" (Prov. 30:5-6). This is what God says, and I would assume that this is the last word on the subject!

In light of God's warning about tampering with His Word, I would suggest that the proper method of approach would be the following:

First, simple portions of Scripture can be translated and used for evangelism. As the number of converts grows within a language group, other portions of Scriptures can be translated and used to teach the new Christians about the things of God. Further, an accurate translation of the Scriptures in a local trade language can often be used to train key tribal leaders who in turn can teach their own people and further the growth process. Through this means, over a period of time, the language of a group can be developed so that eventually it might be able to carry the entire Word of God. We must remember that it took 230 years for the Bible to be perfected in English, from the time of the first translation by Wycliffe from Latin in 1380 to the King James Bible of 1611. During that period, the English language itself was being perfected and matured from its roots in Anglo-Saxon, Latin, French, and other languages.

The above is the method which has been used successfully through the centuries by faithful missionaries who would never have used dynamic equivalency. The Bible should raise the people heavenward, not the other way around. Dynamic equivalency is a backward, upside down way of thinking.

The Bible does not say that the Scriptures must be translated into every language. It says the Gospel is to be preached to all people. While the Gospel can be translated into every tongue, the same is not necessarily true for the whole Bible.

Many make light of the idea of using a trade language to teach people the things of God. They talk much of the necessity of using the "heart language." They say a trade language can never reach the heart. I think that is wrong. Those who understand a language, even though it might not be their mother tongue, can understand the truths of God's Word from that language. Sure, it's always nicer to hear things in one's own mother tongue. That's all well and good. But I say, if necessary, that it would be better to educate an entire people in a trade language so they can have the uncorrupted Word of God rather than corrupt the Word of God through dynamic equivalency.

DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY HAS NO FIRM CONTROLS ON THE TRANSLATION PROCESS

Since dynamic equivalency allows the translator to take so many liberties with the words and form of Scripture, there are no firm controls on the translation process. Consider the following example from the first part of 1 Thess. 1:3. We will give the translation from the faithful KJV and two other literal translations and then from three

dynamic equivalency versions. We will see that the literal translations agree word for word, since there is no textual issue in this passage; but that the dynamic equivalencies are dramatically different, not only from the literal versions but also from one another:

KJV "...your work of faith, and labour of love..."
NASV (New American Standard Version) "... your work of faith and labor of love..."
ESV (English Standard Version) "... your work of faith and labor of love..."

NLB (New Living Bible) "... your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love..."
TEV (Today's English Version) "... how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard..."
CEV (Contemporary English Version) "... your faith and loving work..."

"The sheer range of variability in the dynamic equivalent translations of this verse shows that once fidelity to the language of the original is abandoned, there are no firm controls on interpretation. The result is a destabilized text. Faced with the range of dynamic equivalent translations, how can a reader have confidence in an English translation of this verse? And if it is possible to translate more accurately by abandoning the words of the original for its ideas, why do the dynamic equivalent translations end up in such disagreement with each other? Instead of enhancing accuracy, dynamic equivalence subverts our confidence in the accuracy of the translation" (Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 2002, p. 82).

WHERE WILL DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCY LEAD?

It would be wise to consider just where things are headed now that the method of dynamic equivalency has gained such ascendancy.

NO MORE ACCURATE BIBLES

First, where dynamic equivalency prevails, no more accurate Bibles will be produced. There will only be the loose, undependable paraphrases.

The fact that the United Bible Societies are aggressively pushing to replace the literal ("formal equivalence") versions with their new dynamic equivalence ("common language") versions is openly admitted, at least in their more technical publications. An article appeared in *The Bible Distributor*, Number 27, October-November 1986, entitled "Promoting a Common Language Translation" by Daniel C. Arichea, UBS Translation Consultant for the Asia Pacific region, and M.K. Sembiring, Information Officer of the Indonesian Bible Society. Give close attention to their report:

> How does a Bible Society promote a common language (c.l.)—also called dynamic equivalence (d.e.)—translation? What are the ways to overcome the resistance of church people, both leaders and members alike, to d.e. translations?
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> In 1985, the Indonesian Bible Society embarked on a program to promote the c.l. Indonesian Bible which came off the press in May of that year. Several months before that, the IBS staff started to consider a viable program TO ENSURE THAT THIS NEW TRANSLATION WOULD BE USED BY CHURCHES ALL OVER THE INDONESIAN ARCHIPELAGO. In the planning sessions for this promotional program, the following matters came into focus:
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> Most Indonesian Christians are very fond of the standard translation of 1974, which is a formal correspondence (f.c.) translation, similar in nature to the English Revised Standard Version. The positive attitude toward this translation often results in a rather suspicious and negative attitude toward any other translation. ...
>
> One basic approach that was employed was to promote the c.l. translation, not in lieu of, but in addition to the standard translation that is already loved and used, IN ORDER TO GAIN ACCEPTANCE FOR IT.
>
> The tendency of translation people is to speak very highly of d.e. translations sometimes to the extent of implicitly ridiculing f.c. translations. THERE IS, OF COURSE, JUSTIFICATION FOR SUCH ENTHUSIASM. THE IDEA OF DYNAMIC OR FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENCE TRANSLATIONS IS LIKE THE BIBLICAL PEARL OF GREAT PRICE: ONCE A PERSON FINDS OUT HOW VALUABLE IT IS, THAT PERSON TENDS TO LEAVE ALL OTHER TRANSLATIONS IN FAVOR OF THE NEWLY FOUND

> TREASURE. But such an approach creates problems for people who are already used to other translations. Many people get the idea that the translations that they cherish will no longer be published and, because of that, they begin to resist the new translation even before reading it.
>
> IN VIEW OF THIS, WE DECIDED ON A NEW APPROACH: we promoted both types of translation. Both f.c. translations and d.e. translations are valid translations. The problem is not that one is better than the other, but that it is not often recognized that they are translated on the basis of different translation principles. ... Both translations are valid and both strive to be faithful to the biblical text. But whereas the f.c. translation retains the various biblical forms and terms, the d.e. translation renders these terms in the light of their context; furthermore, it uses language that expresses the meaning of the biblical text as naturally as possible and on a level which is appropriate for the intended readership.
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> THIS APPROACH OF PROMOTING BOTH TRANSLATIONS HAS BROKEN DOWN RESISTANCE TO THE NEW C.L. TRANSLATION. MANY NOW READ IT TOGETHER WITH THE F.C. TRANSLATION. QUITE A FEW HAVE COMPLETELY SWITCHED TO THE C.L. TRANSLATION, ESPECIALLY AFTER REALIZING THAT IT IS MUCH EASIER TO READ AND UNDERSTAND.

From this report of how the common language version is being promoted in Indonesia, the plan and methodology of the United Bible Societies becomes clear. Their goal is ultimately to replace the older "formal equivalence" versions with the dynamic equivalence paraphrases. They liken this new method of translation to the "pearl of great price" and acknowledge that once an individual finds the supposed value of this method he "tends to leave all other translations in favor of the newly found treasure." But they also realize that great numbers of Christians still love the older, literal versions and tend to be skeptical of the new common language versions. Therefore, to "overcome the resistance of church people to dynamic equivalency translations" they plot various approaches whereby over a period of time the people's resistance toward the new paraphrases is cleverly broken down. At first they uphold *both* the old and new versions as valid and good, but the actual goal is to *replace* the formal versions. Thus the authors of the above report proclaim with much enthusiasm, "This approach of promoting both translations has broken down resistance to the new c.l. translation. Many now read it together with the f.c. translation. Quite a few *have completely switched* to the c.l. translation."

In this light, we recall the following quotation from Jakob Van Bruggen's book *The Future of the Bible*:

> "Translations in colloquial language [dynamic equivalency] have the greatest priority. Their total costs are paid and this payment has priority. At the bottom of the list are the translations in traditional church language; no new funds may be formed for these, unless these funds are fed by special campaigns. See the 'Table of Priorities,' *Bible Translator* 23 (1972): p. 220. Paul Ellingworth wrote in the same issue (p. 223): 'Since Bible Societies never have enough money for everything, this means that it is unlikely that they will in the future support for translations in 'traditional ecclesiastical language'" (Jakob Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 67).

We see that there will be no new funding of "traditional ecclesiastical" versions by the United Bible Societies. This is a situation which has existed for quite a few years. In August 1987 I received a letter from Geoff Horner of the British and Foreign Bible Society, who acknowledged that "virtually all translations being carried out at present directly by UBS are CLT's [common language translations]." This same mindset exists in the Wycliffe Bible Translators. ALL of their translations are dynamic equivalency versions. The world is being filled with "Bibles" that are weak paraphrases at best.

Furthermore, the prevalence of dynamic equivalence versions lowers the standard of Bible reading in churches and leads to increasing biblical illiteracy.

> "Finally, after a quarter century of easy-read Bible translations designed to make the Bible accessible to the masses, biblical illiteracy continues to spiral. Instead of solving the problem, modern translations, with their assumption of a theologically inept readership, may have become a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, p. 110).

NO MORE MAJESTIC BIBLES

The Bible is more than a collection of words that must be translated correctly. It is the majestic, powerful Word of the Living God. Of all of the books of the world, only the Bible is authored by God. Thus a good translation of the Bible will be minutely accurate but it will be more than that; it will be majestic. It will not read like a

newspaper or a novel or a political speech but like the eternal Word of God!

Consider the following statements along this line by a professor of literature at a Christian college:

> "What is lost as we move down the continuum from the exalted to the colloquial? The fist thing that is lost is the dignity of the Word of God. If we scale down the stateliness and, where appropriate, the eloquence of the Bible into a flat, prosaic format, the Bible ceases to be anything special. A critic of modern colloquial translations has rightly said that this 'kind of familiarity, too, can breed contempt.' ... A second effect of the diminishment of language is the loss of the effective power of which the King James Bible was once the very touchstone. A reviewer of a modern translation comments on a quoted passage with the statement, 'Almost everything has been lost [from the KJV]: not only the rhythm, but the sense of authority that goes with it--that bracing sense that we aren't appealing to ideas or vague hopes of our own but to firm promises and facts. It has become weak'" (Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 205, 206).
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> "Good rhythm for a Bible is like a qualifying exam: If a translation cannot measure up on this matter, it is not in the running to be a superior Bible for public use and oral reading in more private situations. ... The best test of rhythm is simply to read passages aloud. ... If in oral reading a passage ebbs and flows smoothly, avoids abrupt stops between words and phrases where possible, and provides a sense of continuity, it is rhythmically excellent. If a translation clutters the flow of language and is consistently staccato in effect, it is rhythmically inferior. ... All of these considerations make rhythm an essential translation issue, not a peripheral one. For a book that is read aloud as often as the Bible is, and for a book whose utterances are so frequently charged with strong feeling and sublime ideas, excellent rhythm should be regarded as a given" (Ryken, pp. 257, 259).
>
> "'To make the Bible readable in the modern sense means to flatten out, tone down and convert into tepid expository prose what in K.J.V. is wild, full of awe, poetic, and passionate. It means stepping down the voltage of K.J.V. so it won't blow any fuses'" (Ryken, quoting Dwight Macdonald, "The Bible in Modern Undress," in *Literary Style of the Old Bible and the New*, ed. D.G. Kehl, 1970, p. 40).

"'We are in real danger of losing, in an age of flat prose, an essential and invaluable capacity of the language, fully realized once in the English Bible ... the capacity to express by tone and overtone, by rhythm, and by beauty and force of vocabulary, the religious, the spiritual, the ethical cravings of man'" (Ryken, quoting Henry Canby, "A Sermon on Style," in *Literary Style of the Old Bible and the New*, ed. D.G. Kehl, 1970, p. 427).

"Tone is the literary term that refers to such things as the writer's attitude toward his or her subject matter, the suitability of style for the content, and the correctness of effect on a reader. ... From time to time I encounter the sentiment from dynamic equivalency advocates that the Bible 'should not sound like the Bible.' Billy Graham endorsed *The Living Letters* by saying that 'it is thrilling to read the Word ... [in] a style that reads much like today's newspaper.' I disagree with these verdicts. A sacred book should sound like a sacred book, not like the daily newspaper. It should command attention and respect, and to do so it cannot be expressed in the idiom of the truck stop. The failure of modern colloquial translations is frequently a failure of tone" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, pp. 278, 279, 280).

"What a literary scholar said of one modern translation is generally true of all dynamic equivalent and colloquial translations: it 'does slip more smoothly into the modern ear, but it also slides out more easily; the very strangeness and antique ceremony of the old forms make them linger in the mind.' It is not only the proliferation of translations that has made Bible memorization difficult, if not actually a lost cause. ... These translations are inherently deficient in the qualities that make for memorability" (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, p. 284).

"'I believe the Christian Church has a profound responsibility towards a people's language ... Far from canonizing, or exploiting, the flaccid, vague language of our time, the Bible should be constantly showing it up, directing an arc-light upon it, cauterizing its impurities'" (Ryken, quoting Martin Jarrett-Kerr, "Old Wine: New Bottles," in *The New English Bible Reviewed*, p. 128).

The Scriptures in Hebrew and Greek are beautiful, majestic, and dignified, and when the Scripture is translated accurately and literally by spiritually and literarily qualified people, its inherent majesty will shine through the translation. Dynamic equivalency

cannot produce a truly majestic translation because it takes too many liberties with the Word of God; in fact, dynamic equivalency disdains the majesty and grandeur of the Bible and willfully lowers that most exalted, most noble of books to the level of a lowly newspaper, which has so little value that it is read today and tossed away tomorrow.

NO MORE CONFIDENCE IN BIBLES

It is impossible for thinking people to have confidence in the Bible in these days of multiplying translations. A new translation appears in English almost every year. On a trip to the average Christian bookstore one is confronted with a bewildering variety of versions, all claiming to be better than the others. Can all of these conflicting Bibles really be the Word of God?

> "The effect [of the proliferation of Bible translations] has been to destabilize the biblical text--to render it ever-changing instead of permanent. With this succession of new translations (and their constant revision), people have lost confidence in the reliability of English translations. If every year beings a new translation, apparently the existing ones must not be good enough. And if the previous ones were inadequate, what reason is there to believe that the current ones will be better?" (Ryken, p. 187).

NO MORE MEMORIZATION OF THE BIBLE

The multiplication of Bibles in English has seriously diminished the custom of Scripture memorization. And the loose dynamic equivalency versions almost totally discourage this practice.

> "We have lost a common Bible for English-speaking Christians The Christian community no longer speaks a universal biblical 'language.' And with the loss of a common Bible we have lost ease in memorization of the Bible. After all, when a common Bible exists, people hear it over and over and 'memorize' it virtually without consciously doing so, but this ease is lost when translations multiply. Furthermore, with the proliferation of translations, churches and organizations find it difficult to know which translation to choose for purposes of memorization; and even after they choose, there is such variety that a person faces the prospect of having to memorize from different translations in different settings" (Ryken, The *Word of God in English*, p. 62).

I have seen many examples of this. For example, in August 2003, I visited the Saddleback Community Church in southern California, pastored by Rick Warren of *Purpose Drive Church* fame. I observed on the way into the auditorium that only a few of the people carried Bibles, and the reason became clear when I saw the multiplicity of versions that were used in the preaching. An outline of the sermon was handed out with the bulletin, and six or seven versions were quoted, most of them paraphrases such as the Living Bible, the New Living Bible, The Message, the Today's English Version, and the Contemporary English Version. It would have been impossible to have followed along in one's Bible, regardless of which one you had brought. The result is that a large number of the people do not bring their own Bibles and do not therefore carefully test the preaching.

It is a given that there is less Scripture memorization within such a context as there is when people use one standard formal equivalence translation.

NO MORE WHOLE BIBLES

Where dynamic equivalency prevails there might not be any more whole Bibles. There is a strong move on the part of the United Bible Societies to produce selections of the Bible rather than whole Bibles or even entire New Testaments. Jacob Van Bruggen writes of this development:

> Even such an important common language translation as the TEV is still a thick book. It is not 'easy-to-read' for all people. The goal of the Bible Societies, therefore, is to provide translations for concrete target-groups, such as 'Beginning Readers; Children and Youth; Students and Youth; Women; the Blind and Visually Handicapped; Special Groups (e.g., people on vacation, victims of natural disasters, migrant workers, prisoners, people in hospitals, members of the armed services); Mass Media Audiences; People Listening to Audio Scriptures.' ["Free the Word for Modern Man! The Programme of Advance for the 70's adopted by the UBS Council at Addis Ababa," Sec. I: Main Target Groups, *Bulletin of the UBS 93*, 1973, p. 5ff.]
>
> Separate Bible translations for all of these groups and situations are not possible. To reach such a variety of groups and situations, selected Bible passages must be used. The table below indicates that the production of selections is increasing faster than that of complete Bibles:

Ratio of Bibles to Selections in world distribution of the UBS:

1962 1 Bible to 3.5 selections
1969 1 Bible to 18.5 selections
1974 1 Bible to 33 selections (Van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 30).

Those who are behind the development of this phenomena argue that they are returning to the conditions which existed before the invention of printing made the dissemination of whole Bibles feasible. In fact, they profess that by moving away from the printing of whole Bibles to the production of Bible selections, they are returning to the pure conditions of the early church.

According to Eugene Nida, a complete Bible does not achieve an equivalent effect nearly so well as does a selection:

> "Some persons are still fearful of the consequences of such developments [focusing on the production of Bible portions rather than whole Bibles], but in a sense the Bible Societies are reproducing today the cultural equivalent of what happened in the first generation of the Christian church, when the sayings of Jesus and the accounts of his wonderful deeds were widely circulated either in separate leaflets or evidently, as many scholars believe, as bound series of selections (E. Nida, "A New Epoch in the Bible Societies," *Bulletin of the UBS*, #96, 1974, pp. 7-8).

There is a serious error here. To attempt to return to the first century in this particular matter is regression, not progress. The early churches did not yet have the entire New Testament in one volume, though they did recognize by the guidance of the Holy Spirit which epistles and writings were Holy Scripture and which were spurious. Had the Christians of the first century been given the opportunity to have had the whole Bible beautifully bound in one volume as we can have it today, we can be sure they would have had it and would have treasured it with their lives. That was not God's will; they were living in a transitional period during which the Holy Bible was being completed, its final chapters even then being written. We can praise God that such a day is past. The Book is complete, and the God of History has given man the printing press so the blessed Book can be printed and disseminated throughout the world economically inasmuch that the humblest person can have his own copy of the very Word of God. Amazing! Wonderful! A desire to return to an earlier period of history during which such a blessing was not possible is strange folly. But this is exactly

what is being proposed — and proposed seriously — by the misguided gurus who are leading the influential United Bible Societies.

> "What then is the future of the Bible? Will it remain a complete book, or will it become a bundle of selections? Will the Bible continue to be one book for all, or will each individual in the future have his own folder of selections?" (Van Bruggen, pp. 30-32).

CONCLUSION

For lack of space we cannot go further into the exact principles or errors of dynamic equivalency. Our goal has been to inform God's people of how popular this has become in the last few years, and to warn briefly of it's danger. We are dealing with something which has enormous and growing influence throughout the world—and not only among modernists and neo-evangelicals, but now even among some fundamentalists.

It is crucial to understand that the common language mentality has opened the floodgates of corruption. It is impossible to produce a pure Bible by following these principles. Having loosed themselves and their followers from literal translation principles, the gurus of dynamic equivalency are causing the world to be filled with paraphrases. These people have no anchor. They have loosed themselves from the unbending authority of the original text. Thus there will be no end to the heretical thinking this movement will spawn.

Dear Brethren, be warned and stand fast.