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The *Journal of Theology* is the theological journal of the Church of the Lutheran Confession. The *Journal of Theology* is designed to deepen the understanding and sharpen the skills of those who teach the Word of God. The *Journal of Theology* also testifies to the confession of our church body and serves as a witness to Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, and His unchanging Word.

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In the Footsteps of the Reformers

Jakob Andreae

David J. Reim

The year 1546 was dark and dismal for Lutheranism. On February 18, 1546, Martin Luther died. That is not what made it so dismal. The great reformer received the goal of his faith, the crown of life. That was a reason to rejoice. But when Luther died, all Hell broke loose, quite literally. With Martin Luther out of the way, all the enemies of the true Word of God mounted their attacks against Lutheranism both from within and without.

This attack was led by Satan, “the god of this age” (2 Corinthians 4:4). As Luther said, “The old evil Foe / Now means deadly woe; / Deep guile and great might / Are his dread arms in fight” (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, 262:1). Deep guile and great might are Satan’s two great weapons. He used the might and power of the Holy Roman Empire to try to squash the Lutheran movement by force, and he used his guile and deception to try to destroy the Lutheran church from within.

October 31, 1517, is considered the beginning of the Reformation, but many consider the presentation of the Augsburg Confession to be the official beginning of the Lutheran Church. The Augsburg Confession was presented to Charles V on June 25, 1530. It was the first time Lutheran teachings were clearly laid out and presented to the world.

As one can imagine, the Catholic Church did not accept this confession of the Lutherans but gave their response in the Pontifical Confutation of the Augsburg Confession. There was no discussion, no opportunity for debate or study. Emperor Charles simply demanded that all the German princes agree to the terms of the Confutation and return to Catholicism.

After receiving the Confutation and the demands of the emperor, the Lutheran princes in Germany knew trouble was coming, and they formed the Schmalcaldic League with the promise to defend each other.

The emperor was unable to enforce his demands on the German princes because the Valiant One kept him engaged in battle with France and with the Ottoman Empire. As a result, Charles left the Lutheran princes alone. That gave the Lutherans fifteen years of relative peace when the gospel spread throughout Germany. However, when Luther died, those other conflicts were

resolved, and Charles V saw his opportunity to crush the Lutheran Reformation once and for all. He marched his imperial forces against the Lutheran princes. The Schmalcaldic League banded together to fend off the attacks, but they were no match for the imperial forces. The Holy Roman Empire soundly defeated the Lutherans within a year.

However, Charles found that he could not stop the spread of God's true Word by force of arms. The preaching of the gospel continued, and more and more people came to believe the gospel. Finally, by 1552, six years after Luther's death, Charles V was compelled to sign the Peace of Passau, which granted some freedoms to Protestants. Three years later, the Peace of Augsburg granted Lutheranism official status within the Holy Roman Empire and let princes choose the official religion within the domains they controlled.

"The Word they still shall let remain" (*The Lutheran Hymnal* 262:4). What a powerful and wonderful truth! All the enemies of God may mount their forces to attack the Church and try to stop the spread of the gospel, but they shall *not* succeed! "The Word they still shall let remain, / Nor any thanks have for it." We do not have to thank them for letting the Word remain because it was not their choice to graciously let us have the Word of God. The enemies of Christ simply could not stop the spread of the Word. They could kill the body, and they could conquer the cities, but they could not kill the soul or stop people from believing the Word of God and being faithful to it. Charles had no choice but to let the Word remain.

That is by Jesus' own promise. When Peter confessed that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" Jesus responded, "*On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*" (Matthew 16:16ff). Jesus was going to build His Church upon the solid foundation that "[*Jesus is*] *the Christ, the Son of the living God,*" and nothing could stop Him.

Satan wants desperately to keep his own. He puts up his defenses, but the walls and gates that Satan builds around his domain are no match for the Son of God and His mighty Word. Christ with His mighty Word spoken by the apostles and other believers came crashing through the gates of Hell and built His Church in Jerusalem and then in the Roman Empire, right in the strongholds of Satan. Both the Jews and the Romans tried to stop the spread of the gospel through severe persecution, but they could not stop it. Christ's Church grew.

We see the same thing in the time of the Reformation. The true way of salvation was being spread by the reformers, and Satan and his allies were getting nervous. That wayward monk, Martin Luther, was gathering more and more followers. This new movement was getting out of hand. The Catholic Church was losing its power and its dominion. So Satan pulled out all the stops to try putting an end to the spread of the gospel, but the gates of Hell could not stop the Reformation. Christ was building His Church where Satan once had his domain.

However, Satan did not give up. The Peace of Augsburg did not mean that there was peace within the Lutheran Church. If Satan could not stomp out the Church by force, he would try to corrupt it with his guile and deception. Luther had been a strong, stabilizing force in the church, but with him gone, it seemed that everyone had his own ideas and his own variations on the Word. This was a time of unending controversy that arose within the Lutheran Church.

But this would not stop the truth of God's Word either. God raised up other great men and reformers, including Jakob Andreae. We also want to follow in his footsteps.

Jakob Andreae was a professor of theology in the University of Tübingen (1562), and provost of the church of St. George. Andreae was greatly disturbed by the lack of unity within Lutheranism. He made it his goal to reunite the quarreling groups within Lutheranism. But he did not do it by compromise of doctrine. Rather, he set out to restore orthodoxy in the Lutheran Church.

Andreae began his efforts by patiently trying to teach those who held to false teachings. Sadly, even the faculty at Wittenberg had ceased to be orthodox by this time. He soon saw a need for another confession to which the churches could subscribe, because groups were citing the Augsburg Confession against each other.

Andreae joined forces with Martin Chemnitz and others to develop what we know as the *Solid Declaration of the Formula of Concord*. These men also compiled the *Book of Concord*, which was finally published on June 25, 1580—exactly 50 years after the Augsburg Confession had been presented to Charles V. This succeeded in bringing about the Lutheran unity for which Andreae had been searching so long.

We want to follow in the footsteps of Jakob Andreae and the other reformers. God's Word is being undermined and challenged by the deep guile of the devil, who continues to spread false teaching more than ever in Christian churches today.

We are reminded by Jakob Andreae and Martin Chemnitz that our purpose as Christ's servants is to proclaim the truth of God's Word, and to use God's Word to refute error wherever it arises. Compromising the Word of God never helps build the Church or strengthen faith. Compromise is another way Satan seeks to silence the truth. Like Andreae and Chemnitz, we need to hold onto the truth alone and proclaim it to the world.

When we stand firm on the truth, and unity cannot be reached through teaching the Word, then separation from false teachers is necessary and such separation is God pleasing. By separating from false teachers, we are giving an expression of God's love and protection for the souls under our care. Likewise, it is an expression of love to those who are still caught in the error to give a strong testimony concerning the seriousness of error. Furthermore, it is our expression of love for God and His Word. But it is always a sad thing when doctrinal disagreement divides the visible church on earth. It is sad because that means many people are still being deceived.

May we learn from Andreae and Chemnitz to treasure the unity that God has given us in our church body and to desire restoration of true unity where it has been lost. May we use the unchangeable and unbreakable Word to work toward true unity in the Word. We can rejoice and thank God for the progress that has been made, but we also want to be sure we are truly speaking the same thing so that any unity is not gained at the cost of any point of Scripture. There are two dangers we always face: on the one hand, a desire for unity may cause us to overlook some point of difference; and on the other hand, fear and distrust can lead us to overlook or deny a unity that may be there. We seek the Spirit of wisdom to help us see and understand clearly so that God's Word may prevail.

If we are unable to achieve the desired unity, may it not be because of any failure on our part—whether from fear, or lack of trying, or from concluding that genuine unity is impossible. Jakob Andreae and Martin Luther spent countless hours traveling, meeting, studying, and discussing. God blessed their work with the formation of the *Formula of Concord*, which clarified the truth of

Scripture and did work to restore unity to the Lutheran Church and still serves to keep us on the straight path.

God's Word will remain forever, as God says,

*All flesh is as grass,
And all the glory of man as the flower of the grass.
The grass withers,
And its flower falls away,
But the word of the Lord endures forever (1 Peter 1:24f).*

Nothing can stop the spread of the gospel or silence it. We pray fervently that we may always continue steadfastly in that Word. Therefore we offer the prayer,

Lord, keep us steadfast in Your Word;
Curb those who by deceit and sword
Would wrest the kingdom from Your Son
And bring to naught all He has done.

Lord Jesus Christ, Your pow'r make known,
For You are Lord of lords alone;
Defend Your holy Church that we
May sing Your praise eternally.

O Comforter of priceless worth,
Send peace and unity on earth;
Support us in our final strife
And lead us out of death to life.

(Lutheran Service Book 655 / cf. The Lutheran Hymnal 261)



Translation Theory and Verbal Inspiration

Is Functional Equivalence Consistent with the Teaching of Verbal Inspiration?

David J. Reim

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16 ESV).

“These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual” (1 Corinthians 2:13).

“And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Peter 1:19-21).

From these and many other passages, we believe, teach, and confess verbal-plenary inspiration. *Verbal* inspiration emphasizes that the very words of Scripture are directly from God. God breathed His Word into the prophets and apostles and evangelists so that they wrote not only the thoughts, but the very words which God gave them. In 2 Timothy 3:16, it is not the men who were inspired, but rather, the γραφή, the Scriptures, the written words which were God-breathed.

Plenary inspiration emphasizes that every word in the entirety of the Bible is from God. *All* Scripture is God-breathed. There is not a single word or phrase that is not directly from God. Therefore, we also know that the Scriptures are infallible and authoritative.

Verbal-plenary inspiration is a foundational teaching for Christianity. It is only because of this truth that we can speak and preach with absolute confidence, “Thus says the Lord.” Without such certain inspiration we could not be sure of any teaching in Scripture. It is no surprise then that modern liberal theologians have forsaken the teaching of verbal inspiration. They might teach a kind of conceptual inspiration—that God conveyed the thoughts and concepts He wanted, and the writers put it in their own words—or they deny inspiration entirely. That allows them to add, subtract, and adapt the Scriptures to suit their own liking and belief.

Strictly speaking, verbal-plenary inspiration applies only to the original autographs. The words written by the apostles, prophets, and evangelists were all the very words of God. The question that we address is, “How can we best preserve the verbally inspired words of the original languages in translation?” A related question is, “Are certain methods of translation in conflict with this precious teaching of verbal-plenary inspiration?” With the plethora of new translations available, and often with wide variations among them, the answer to that question is all the more vital.

There are basically two different theories or methods of translating—we do not consider a paraphrase to be a translation. Different translators describe their method of translation with different terms, but they all fall into one of two basic groups. For our purposes, we will call these two translation methods *formal equivalence* and *functional equivalence* (also frequently called *dynamic equivalence*).¹

Are both of these methods consistent with the belief in verbal inspiration? Let’s take a closer look.

Formal Equivalence

By *formal equivalence* we mean a translation that strives to preserve the *form* of the original in the translation. It is not always possible, but translators using this method generally try their best to represent in translation the exact words and grammatical syntax of the original text. To that end they generally translate verbs as verbs, nouns as nouns, adjectives as adjectives, and so forth. This method of translating puts emphasis on the *grammatical and literary form* of the original text.

Every translator seeking formal equivalence knows that it is impossible to preserve completely the form of the original and still have an understandable

¹ The term “dynamic equivalence” was coined and defined by Eugene Nida. He explained that this term described “the quality of a translation in which the message of the original text has been so transported into the receptor language that the response of the receptor is essentially like that of the original receptors” (*The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Eugene Nida and Charles Taber, E. J. Brill, Leiden, The Netherlands, 1969, p. 202). That statement has often been criticized by opponents of dynamic equivalence, saying that we do not necessarily want to reproduce the response of the original reader/hearer because that response was often one of rejecting the Word. However, by “response” the author seemed to have the reader’s/hearer’s understanding of the message in mind more than his response to it. Eugene Nida himself changed his terminology to speak of “functional equivalence” because of a misunderstanding of the translation method and the abuse of it by some translators (*From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating*, Eugene Nida and Jan de Waard, Thomas Nelson, 1986, pp. 36–40).

translation, but he strives for that goal as much as possible. Robert P. Martin states it this way:

The formal equivalence philosophy or method of translating attempts to say “what” the original text says by retaining “how” it says it (as far as English grammar allows). Although clear English expression does not always allow the formal equivalence translator to do so, he tries not to adjust the idioms which the original writer used; rather he attempts to render them more-or-less literally.²

Translations that claim formal equivalence include the *King James Version* (KJV), *New King James Version* (NKJV, Thomas Nelson), *New American Standard Bible* (NASB, Lockman Foundation), *English Standard Version* (ESV, Crossway Bibles), *Holman Christian Standard Bible* (HCSB, Holman Bible Publishers), and *Revised Standard Version* (RSV, National Council of the Churches of Christ).

The NKJV translators speak of *complete equivalence in translation*.

[T]he most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.³

The New King James Version follows the historic precedent of the Authorized Version in maintaining a literal approach to translation, except where the idiom of the original language cannot be translated directly into our tongue.⁴

The ESV translators refer to their translation method as “essentially literal.” They seek as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original

² Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version*, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989, p. 8.

³ The Preface to the NKJV Nelson Study Bible, pp. viii-ix

⁴ The Preface to the NKJV Nelson Study Bible, p. xi

languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.

Every translation is at many points a trade-off between literal precision and readability, between “formal equivalence” in expression and “functional equivalence” in communication, and the ESV is no exception. Within this framework we have sought to be “as literal as possible” while maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence.

As an essentially literal translation, then, the ESV seeks to carry over every possible nuance of meaning in the original words of Scripture into our own language.⁵

The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) translation committee sought to strike a balance between the two prevailing philosophies of Bible translation. The translators called this balance “optimal equivalence.”^{6, 7}

One can see some variation in degree of formal equivalence through the terms each translation chooses. The NKJV’s claim of “complete equivalence” suggests that it strives to give the reader the most literal translation possible. ESV with its “essentially literal” suggests a looser hold on exact form to maintain what is essential while striving to also be more readable. The HCSB seems to claim the optimal balance between form and function with their “optimal equivalence,” but they all fall under the general heading, *formal equivalence*.

⁵ The Preface to the English Standard Version, pp. xv-xvi

⁶ Introduction to the Holman Christian Standard Bible

⁷ **Editor Note:** A revision of the HCSB is scheduled for release in March 2017. From that point forward, this translation will be known as the Christian Standard Bible (CSB). The publisher’s website indicates that the translation philosophy has not changed.

“The CSB was created using Optimal Equivalence, a translation philosophy that balances linguistic precision to the original languages and readability in contemporary English.

“In the many places throughout Scripture where a word-for-word rendering is clearly understandable, a literal translation is used. When a word-for-word rendering might obscure the meaning for a modern audience, a more dynamic translation is used. This process assures that both the words and thoughts contained in the original text are conveyed as accurately as possible for today’s readers.

“On one hand, the CSB provides a highly accurate text for sermon preparation and serious study, translated from the biblical languages by scholars who love God’s Word. On the other hand, it doesn’t compromise readability and clarity for those who may be less familiar with the traditional (and sometimes difficult) vocabulary retained in some translations.”

Considering that God carefully chose every word and said exactly what He wanted to say and how He wanted to say it, a translation method that seeks to preserve every nuance of the original as far as possible is certainly consistent with the belief in verbal inspiration. Interestingly, the translators of most formal equivalence translations are required to sign a statement that they believe in the verbal-plenary inspiration of the Scriptures and in the inerrancy of the original autographs.

Functional Equivalence

In contrast to *formal* equivalence, *functional* equivalence focuses more on the meaning of the text and attempts to communicate accurately the meaning of the original to the reader of the English Bible. Translators who follow this approach are not as concerned about maintaining the grammatical and syntactical forms of the original. Rather, they strive to convey the same meaning so that it functions in the same way as the original did. They want to produce a functional translation that is as readily understood by today's readers as the original was by its readers.

Rodney J. Decker, Th.D., Associate Professor of New Testament studies at Baptist Bible Seminary, describes functional equivalence this way:

Although the form may differ somewhat in functional equivalence, the translation functions the same as the original in that it accurately communicates the same meaning.

This approach should not be described as a "thought for thought" translation, but one which alters the grammatical form when necessary to preserve accuracy of meaning. In some cases, form and meaning are inter-related, and in such cases functional equivalence will attempt to preserve the necessary formal elements. But in most instances the form is language-specific and is not essential to expressing the meaning in another language. In many cases, it cannot be maintained. Every translation, including the most formal, makes many substantial revisions to the form of the original.⁸

It is pointed out that functional equivalence in translation is not new. There is much of it in the *Septuagint* and even in the KJV and NASB. For example, when the KJV translation has Paul saying "God forbid" ten times in his letter to

⁸ Rodney J. Decker, *Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and Translation*, p. 37.

the Romans, that is a functionally equivalent translation, for neither the words “God” nor “forbid” are actually in the original. Rather, the translators used an expression common at the time of King James that communicates the thought of Paul’s μή γένοιτο.

Some translations that use the functional equivalence method are: the *New International Version* (NIV, Zondervan), *New English Bible* (NEB, Oxford University Press), *Today’s English Version/Good News Bible/Good News Translation* (TEV/GNB/GNT, American Bible Society), *The Jerusalem Bible* (JB, Random House), *Contemporary English Version* (CEV, American Bible Society), *New English Translation* (NET, Biblical Studies Press), *The New Testament in Modern English* (J.B. Phillips, Archbishops’ Council of the Church of England), and the *Cotton Patch Version* (Association Press).

In the preface to the NIV, the translators state:

The first concern of the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words. . . . Concern for clear and natural English—that the New International Version should be idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated—motivated the translators and consultants. At the same time, they tried to reflect the differing styles of the biblical writers.⁹

The translation theory in NIV ©2011 does not change, but the translators add:

And so in the original NIV charter, provision was made not just to issue periodic updates to the text but also to create a mechanism for constant monitoring of changes in biblical scholarship and English usage. The Committee on Bible Translation was charged to meet every year to review, maintain, and strengthen the NIV’s ability to accurately and faithfully render God’s unchanging Word in modern English.

⁹ The Preface to the NIV (1978) pp. vii – viii

The 2011 update to the NIV is the latest fruit of this process. By working with input from pastors and Bible scholars, by grappling with the latest discoveries about biblical languages and the biblical world, and by using cutting-edge research on English usage, the Committee on Bible Translation has updated the text to ensure that the New International Version of the Bible remains faithful to Howard Long's original inspiration.¹⁰

The Contemporary English Version (CEV) translators claim:

The CEV is not a paraphrase. It is an accurate and faithful translation of the original manuscripts.

Accuracy, beauty, clarity, and dignity—all of these can and must be achieved in the translation of the Bible. After all, as the translators of the King James Version stated, "This is the Word of God, which we translate."

Every attempt has been made to produce a text that is faithful to the *meaning* of the original.¹¹

The CEV translators' specific goal is to produce a translation that is easy and natural to listen to, claiming that most people hear the Bible read more than actually reading it themselves. They set their goal to produce a translation that must be understood by people without stumbling in speech, must be understood by those with little or no comprehension of "Bible" language, and must be understood by all.

In the preface to the first edition, W. Hall Harris III, PhD, the NET Bible Project Director, claims that the NET Bible solves the problem of dynamic vs. formal equivalence.

[T]he translators and editors used the notes to give a translation that was formally equivalent, while placing a somewhat more functionally [or dynamically] equivalent translation in the text itself to promote better readability and understandability. The longstanding tension between these two different approaches to Bible translation has thus been fundamentally solved.

¹⁰ The Preface to the NIV (2011)

¹¹ Preface to the Contemporary English Version

The translators' notes make the original languages far more accessible, allowing you to look over the translator's shoulder at the very process of translation.¹²

Is the functional or dynamic equivalence theory of translating Scripture consistent with the teaching of verbal inspiration?

This is a hotly debated topic, and there are good points made on both sides. At the same time, there are many generalities, misrepresentations, and a use of simplistic examples that only serve to confuse the issue. Following are the basic arguments from both sides.

Against Functional Equivalence

William O. Einwechter, an author and teaching elder at Immanuel Free Reformed Church (Stevens, Pennsylvania), strongly argues that functional equivalence is *not* consistent with the teaching of verbal inspiration. Note that he uses the abbreviations FE and DE for formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence.

FE is concerned to keep interpretation to a minimum, while DE makes interpretation the center of its method.

How are we to judge between these two philosophies of translation? The only proper standard by which to judge between them is the Word of God; specifically, the doctrine of verbal inspiration, for this doctrine bears directly on the issue of translation theory. Since the very *words* of Scripture have been inspired by God—not just the ideas or concepts of Scripture—it follows that this fact of verbal inspiration should be reflected in translation philosophy. If the word is the basic unit of inspiration, should not the word be the basic unit of translation? If God has been pleased to give to men His inspired words in the original Hebrew and Greek Scriptures, should not the translator strive to transfer as closely as possible those very words into English?

It is therefore evident that the FE method, which gives priority to translating the words and grammatical forms of Scripture into their nearest English equivalents, is in definite harmony with the doctrine

¹² Preface to the New English Translation

of verbal inspiration. While on the other hand, it is apparent that the DE method, which focuses on transferring only the meaning or thought of the original, implicitly denies (at least in practice) the importance of verbal inspiration and is really more consistent with the heretical view of conceptual inspiration.

In order for the verbal and plenary inspiration of the Bible to be properly acknowledged in the work of translation, the primary unit of translation must be the word, not just the idea. Any method of translation that departs from that commitment is in serious conflict with the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration. . . . Plainly speaking, the formal equivalence method of translation is philosophically committed to regarding and guarding the individual words of the original text as the primary units of translation; the dynamic equivalence method is not (Robert P. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation*, pp.16-17).

If the philosophy of DE is not grounded on the doctrine of verbal inspiration, then what is it based on? According to van Bruggen, the theory of DE “is related to a view of God, man, and the world closely associated with modern philosophy and the sciences based upon it” (Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 78). And further, he states that the DE “translation theory owes its influence and effect to the blending of modern theological prejudices regarding the Bible with data borrowed from communication theory, cultural anthropology, and modern sociology.” (Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 151).¹³ Therefore, the theory and practice of DE is built upon the sands of conceptual inspiration and modern and often humanistic science and philosophy, while FE has a firm foundation in the biblical doctrine of verbal inspiration.

Consequently, when we apply the doctrine of verbal inspiration to the issue of translation philosophy, we come to the clear and definite conclusion that the only trustworthy versions of the Bible in English

¹³ In his citation of this quote, Einwechter comments, “Van Bruggen’s book provides an excellent and incisive theological critique of the DE method of translation. See especially pp. 67-96, 99-110, 151-168. For the affinity of DE with modern theories of language and hermeneutics, see Thomas, *Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?*”

are those that are translated according to the practice of FE. Because DE is not based on sound scriptural principles and presuppositions, its practice in Bible translation leads to grave and serious consequences. On the one hand, it presents a translation that is really more of an interpretation; thus, it often distorts God's Word and frequently leaves the English reader with the word of man because the DE translator has wrongly interpreted the meaning of the original Hebrew or Greek. When a DE translator errs in his analysis of the text, he does not transfer God's inspired Word to his readers, but only his own flawed understanding of the text.

On the other hand, DE seriously undermines the church's doctrine of verbal inspiration. DE in the church's Bible translations is the first step to the heresy of conceptual (or dynamic) inspiration in the church's doctrine. Will the crucial doctrine of verbal inspiration survive in a church that promotes a translation that in practice denies it? As Martin warns, "Where the dynamic method of translation is embraced, it is but one small step to embracing the dynamic view of inspiration as well" (Martin, *Accuracy of Translation*, p. 69).

It is imperative that the church vigorously defends and proclaims the doctrine of verbal inspiration in its preaching and creeds; but this in itself is not enough. The church must also see the connection between its theology of inspiration and its philosophy of translation, lest it undermine the former by the latter. This is exactly what happens when an orthodox confessing church promotes the use of DE translations: its orthodox creed says "verbal inspiration," while its DE translation implies "dynamic inspiration." Therefore, the church must not only preach the doctrine of verbal inspiration, it must also teach how this doctrine commends the translation philosophy of FE, and then it must promote this doctrine by the public use of FE translations of Scripture.¹⁴

The promoters of the ESV make similar statements, as Thomas Nass points out in his review of the ESV.

Both Wayne Grudem, the ESV instigator, and Leland Ryken, the ESV apologist, make such claims. Grudem writes, "The idea that all the

¹⁴ William O. Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?*, pp. 1-19.

words of Scripture are the words of God—strongly favors essentially literal translation of the Bible, and seriously calls into question the theory of dynamic equivalence translation” (fn 64: Wayne Grudem, *“Are Only Some Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God? Why Plenary Inspiration Favors ‘Essentially Literal’ Bible Translations,”* in *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation*, p. 56) Leland Ryken writes, “It is my belief that an essentially literal translation is congruent with the doctrine of verbal or plenary inspiration” (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, p. 134). Ryken goes on to say that translating in a thought-for-thought fashion is similar to twentieth-century neo-orthodoxy—not taking the inspired words of God seriously enough.¹⁵

In Favor of Functional Equivalence

In favor of functional equivalence, Thomas Nass responds in his review of the ESV:

These statements may sound pious, and certainly they come from a high respect for God’s Word. However, they are seriously misguided and they need to be vigorously opposed.

The previous sections of this paper give reasons why these statements are misguided. Literal, word-for-word translating goes well as long as the source and receptor languages have similar vocabulary and structures. However, no two languages are the same in their structure and vocabulary, so changes inevitably need to take place in translation if one wants to communicate accurately and clearly. Literal translations can sometimes be inaccurate or unclear.

In terms of Lutheran doctrinal theology, we believe that God has verbally inspired each and every word of the original texts (the *materia*). Each word is important and treasured because it comes from God. However, the true essence (the *forma*) of God’s inspired revelation is the thought or truth or message that is conveyed through the vehicle of the words as they are combined in a context, not the outward words themselves. Hoenecke writes, “The essence

¹⁵ Thomas Nass, “Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108 (2011) 279.

of God's Word is not the sounds, tones, letters, syllables, words, and sentences. It is the divine truth contained in the words" (Adolf Hoenecke, *Evangelical Lutheran Dogmatics: Volume IV*, p. 5). Words serve the meaning; the meaning does not serve the words.

That is why it is possible to translate the Bible into other languages. The idea that God presents through Hebrew and Greek words is able to be communicated in other languages. When the idea is communicated accurately, we can legitimately say that the translation is God's Word. The divine truth is the essence of God's Word, and not the outward form of the Hebrew and the Greek. This, of course, means that there is nothing inherently holier or purer in having a form in the translation that is identical to or close to the form in the Hebrew and Greek. We should not overstate the case in regard to the outward words. It is possible to have an overemphasis on the original's wording rather than on the original's meaning (William F. Beck makes these points in a useful article entitled "The Translation of Meaning," in *Christian News*, December 8, 1998, pp. 5-6).

Strict Moslems, you may know, insist that the Koran cannot be translated into other languages. It must be read in Arabic because that is the inspired text. Protestant Christians on the other hand, have generally welcomed vernacular translations. They know the heart of the matter is the message, and the message can be transferred into other languages.

In short, one can have a high view of Scripture as the verbally inspired Word of God, and still prefer a translation method that is functional[ly] equivalent. Many Bible-believing Christians have done so. People who have a high view of Scripture may well find themselves more concerned about the transparency or comprehensibility of the divine message for the reader, than about the transparency of the translation to the form of the original Greek and Hebrew. Above all, they may want God's message to be understandable and clear.¹⁶

¹⁶ Thomas Nass, "Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation," *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108 (2011) 279-280.

Thomas Nass cites Martin Luther in support of this translation method.

There are two main works in which Luther describes his translation philosophy. In 1530 he wrote “On Translating: An Open Letter” (German: *Sendbrief vom Dolmetschen*, *Luther’s Works* (LW), Volume 35, pp. 175-202). In 1531 he wrote “Defense of the Translation of the Psalms” (German: *Ursachen des Dolmetschens*, LW 35:203-223). In these writings Luther defends his desire to produce a translation that is idiomatic German. He says that there are times when a translator must translate literally if a significant doctrinal point is at stake (LW 35:194, 216). But in general, he sought to make his Bible translation read naturally in German as if it had been originally composed in German. As a translator he tried to remove “boulders and clods” so that the reader could move along “as over a smoothly-planed board” (LW 35:188).

Here are some quotations:

I have constantly tried, in translating, to produce a pure and clear German, and it has often happened that for two or three or four weeks we have searched and inquired for a single word and sometimes not found it even then (LW 35:188).

Again in Psalm 68 we ran quite a risk, relinquishing the words and rendering the sense. For this many know-it-alls will criticize us, to be sure, and even some pious souls may take offense. But what is the point of needlessly adhering so scrupulously and stubbornly to words which one cannot understand anyway? Whoever would speak German must not use Hebrew style. Rather he must see to it—once he understands the Hebrew author—that he concentrates on the sense of the text, asking himself, “Pray tell, what do the Germans say in such a situation?” Once he has the German words to serve the purpose, let him drop the Hebrew words and express the meaning freely in the best German he knows (LW 35:213-214).

We must inquire about this of the mother in the home, the children on the street, the common man in the marketplace. We must be guided by their language, the way they speak, and do our translating accordingly (LW 35:189).

I must let the literal words go and try to learn how the German says that which the Hebrew expresses (LW 35:193).

More quotations can be found in an essay by . . . Ernest R. Wendland, entitled: “Martin Luther—The Father of Confessional, Functional-Equivalence Bible Translation” (pp. 16-36, 47-60). Eugene Nida is sometimes regarded as the father of the dynamic/functional equivalent method of Bible translation in English (Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, p. 13). But notice that Wendland gives the ultimate credit for this method to Martin Luther!

One flash point in the debate at Luther’s time was the translation of Romans 3:28. Recall that Luther inserted the word *allein* even though it was not present in the Greek.

Romans 3:28 – λογιζόμεθα γὰρ δικαιοῦσθαι πίστει ἄνθρωπον χωρὶς ἔργων νόμου.

Luther: So halten wir es nun, dass der Mensch gerecht werde ohne des Gesetzes Werke, *allein* durch den Glauben.

In his “Open Letter,” Luther says that it was legitimate to add the word, because it was needed in German to make the thought perfectly clear. “It belongs there if the translation is to be clear and vigorous. . . . This is the German usage, even though it is not the Latin or Greek usage” (LW 35:188, 189).

The biblical book that Luther expended the most time and energy on was the book of Psalms, and it is interesting to compare his earlier translations of the Psalms with his latest translation. The first edition of the Psalms came out in 1524. There was a revision in 1528. Then in 1531 Luther came out with a revision that has been called “the most thoroughgoing revision he ever undertook of an important book of the Bible” (Heinz Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*, p. 117). In this last revision, Luther went further than before in rendering passages freely, showing a “breathtaking degree of freedom” at places (Bluhm, *Martin Luther: Creative Translator*, p. 117). It is interesting to see that the older Luther grew, the more he cut himself loose to translate in a “functional[ly] equivalent” manner.

For Martin Luther, the purpose of a vernacular translation was not to provide a crib or “jimmy” or interlinear for beginning Hebrew and

Greek students. This seems to be what some people are looking for in a translation today, especially those who are unaware of the linguistic complexities of translation and who have a “mechanical view of language” (D.A. Carson, *“The Challenge of Bible Translation,”* p. 103). Rather, Luther wanted his translation to communicate the message of God’s Word clearly to people who did not know any Hebrew and Greek. The purpose was communication not copying.¹⁷

General Observations

What shall we make of these two very opposing answers to the question about functional equivalence as a theory of translation? After evaluating the arguments on both sides, this writer has come to the conclusion that we are asking the wrong question.

All translators use some degree of functional equivalence and admit that it is impossible to have a strictly formally equivalent translation that is understandable in English. That is more true in the Old Testament than the New because the Hebrew language has a much greater difference in form from English than Greek does. Therefore, it would seem foolish to argue that functional equivalence is a faulty method of translation or that it is not consistent with the teaching of verbal inspiration and even undermines that teaching. Such statements will naturally and rightly bring strong objection.

The question is not so much whether functional equivalence as a translation method is consistent with verbal inspiration. If used properly, it certainly can be. The real question is: How is functional equivalence used? As many have pointed out, it is not so much a matter of one or the other but a difference of degree.

Functional equivalence is a legitimate method of translation *as long as* it is truly equivalent! However, something strange and disturbing happens when one crosses that line from formal equivalence as the general method of translating to functional equivalence. It’s like the flood gates are opened. Some use it more judiciously, and others seem to be like a calf let out of the stall kicking with delight in its new-found freedom. There is a much greater degree of variation among versions that use functional equivalence as their primary method of translating—in general, the more “functional,” the more

¹⁷ Thomas Nass, “Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* 108 (2011) 280-283.

questionable the translation. The most extreme use of functional translation results in a paraphrase rather than an actual translation.

The CEV, for example, is said to be an accurate translation of the original, not a paraphrase, in which “Every attempt has been made to produce a text that is faithful to the meaning of the original.” However, it is difficult to see in what way they were faithful to the original. Judge for yourself how faithful they are:

Genesis 6:8: יְהוָה מָצָא חֵן בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה

In this verse a very formal equivalence works quite well. A word-for-word, literal translation is perfectly understandable in English. “And Noah found (or acquired) grace (or favor) in the eyes of the LORD.”

CEV: “But the Lord was pleased with Noah.”

The CEV translation is very different from the form of the original. The subject of the Hebrew sentence becomes the object of the preposition in the CEV translation, and the direct object of the Hebrew (grace) is missing entirely from the CEV translation. In this translation, the passage is turned from a message of grace that Noah received from God to a message that implies God was pleased with Noah because of how he lived.

One of the objectives of the CEV was to avoid using biblical terminology that is unfamiliar to the common people. In accord with that objective, they do not translate δικαιοσύνη as *justify* but as *accept*. For example:

Romans 3:20: διότι ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον αὐτοῦ, διὰ γὰρ νόμου ἐπίγνωσις ἁμαρτίας.

NKJV: *Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

CEV: *God doesn't accept people simply because they obey the Law. No, indeed! All the Law does is to point out our sin.*

Romans 3:24: δικαιοσύμενοι δωρεὰν τῇ αὐτοῦ χάριτι διὰ τῆς ἀπολυτρώσεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

NKJV: *being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ*

CEV: *But God treats us much better than we deserve, and because of Christ Jesus, he freely accepts us and sets us free from our sins.*

Aside from all the other changes in words and grammar, we must ask if “accepts” accurately conveys the meaning of δικαιούνη? If one wants to avoid the use of “justify” because people are not familiar with it, he could easily translate it as “declares righteous” or “pronounces innocent.” While “accept” might be the end result of justification, it says nothing about how God is able to accept us, whereas “justifies” covers it all in one word. So at best, valuable meaning is lost in the CEV’s functionally equivalent translation.

We can appreciate the desire to make the Bible easier to understand for novices who are not familiar with certain terms. However, is it helpful in any way to remove precious words like *justify* and *redeem* because people are unfamiliar with them? Virtually every profession has its own technical terms that must be learned if one wants to understand what they are talking about. Is it too much to expect that if people want to understand the Bible they will need to learn some new words? Instead of dumbing down the Bible, they can learn to treasure those precious terms.

From these few examples it would appear that some translations, like the CEV, use functional equivalence as a license to change God’s Word to say what they want. The CEV translators reveal their agenda in their preface. They say that they have not created new or novel interpretations of the text. Rather, it was their goal to express mainstream interpretations of the text in current, everyday English.

Not only do they admit that they are giving an interpretation of the text, they are presenting the “mainstream interpretations.” Sadly, mainstream interpretation of the Bible today is full of false teaching. It is their goal to “express” those interpretations in everyday English. Though they claim to use functional equivalence in translating, in reality their translation is not equivalent to the original in any sense of the word.

In regard to such translations, we would agree with the accusations of William O. Einwechter. That kind of translating, if it can even be called translating, is *not* consistent with the teaching of verbal inspiration. Nor did the translators of such versions sign a statement claiming to believe in verbal inspiration.

Not every functional equivalent translation is that bad. Some, like the NIV, are more conscientious about accurately representing the original.

Observations about Using Functional Equivalence as the Standard Method of Translating

The fact that the New Testament was written in *Koine* Greek, the language of the common people, shows that God wants His Word to be readily understandable by the common people. Those who are legitimately striving to do this in English are not to be faulted or accused of not upholding verbal inspiration. Functional equivalence can be used to achieve that goal, but it is not without its dangers.

Functional equivalence is touted as necessary to accurately communicate the meaning of God's Word. Indeed, that is the strength of functional equivalence and why it is needed in some places. Ironically, that is also its greatest weakness as a translation method. By focusing on the meaning rather than the words, grammar, and syntax, the result is naturally more subjective and opens the door to many more subtle changes that do actually lose meaning or even change the meaning.

Those who support more functional equivalence in translation will often show a "need" for it through examples for which even the most staunch supporter of formal equivalence would agree that a functionally equivalent translation is needed. Those simple examples are then used to promote functional equivalence as the standard method of translating all of Scripture. Is that really a legitimate line of reasoning? Those who oppose functional equivalence are not so much opposed to its use where it is needed, as they are opposed to using it as the overall method of translating.

In the same way, using Martin Luther to support functional equivalence as a standard method of translation is also questionable. The quotes given indicate that Luther was very conscious of making a translation that the common people could read and understand for themselves. He wanted to translate into the language of the people. As a result he did use functional equivalence in his translation. However, it is a stretch to say that he made this the *overall* method of translating. Rather, Luther's Bible is a great example of a formal equivalence translation which has a good sense for when a more functional equivalence is needed. The very fact that some critics of his day picked on a few passages in his translation shows that functional equivalence was not his

primary method of translating, but it was used when and where it was necessary to communicate the meaning of the passage accurately. Even the best functional equivalence translation today is more free in translation than Luther was. It is questionable to suppose that Luther would be in support of them.

It should be pointed out that functional equivalence is not the only way to make a translation easier to read. One can use common, everyday words and adjust word order so that it reads smoothly without dramatically changing the form of the sentence. Luther's translation is a great example of that. We can see that also in the difference between the NASB and the ESV or NKJV for example. The NASB is written at a higher educational level and has some advantages for serious study in that way, while the ESV is much more readable by the average person. Yet both maintain a fairly high level of formal equivalence and faithfulness to the words of Scripture.

Whose Meaning?

When the main thrust is on communicating the meaning, one has to wonder, "Whose meaning am I receiving?"

By its very nature, functional equivalence requires a degree of interpretation. If the focus is on communicating the meaning accurately, one has to determine what that meaning is and then decide how best to communicate that meaning. That process opens the door for several problems and concerns.

If the focus is on the meaning, it is inevitable that the translator will translate in accord with his understanding of the meaning. The reason a formal equivalence translator tries to keep functional equivalence to a minimum is to keep his own interpretation to a minimum. He wants to keep his own thought out of the picture as much as possible and let God speak.

When functional equivalence is made the standard method of translating the Bible, that of necessity will dramatically increase the amount of interpretation that goes into the translation. When the translator's interpretation is in fact the intended meaning of the Holy Spirit, we can agree with Thomas Nass when he said above, "When the idea is communicated accurately, we can legitimately say that the translation is God's Word. The divine truth is the essence of God's Word, and not the outward form of the

Hebrew and the Greek.” That is true, *“when the idea is communicated accurately.”* What if it is not communicated accurately? Then one cannot say it is God’s Word.

Authors sometimes use a wide variety of translations in their religious books. They claim that in this way we can benefit from the best of each. That might be true if the author carefully checks the original and chooses the translation that best conveys the truth. However, one gets the impression that they often choose the translation that says what they want, not necessarily the one that best translated God’s Word. One author asserted boldly, “God said it this way,” and then quoted from a very highly functionally equivalent translation. When examined with the original, the words were not at all what God said.

How is the average reader to know if and when the idea is communicated accurately? Thomas Edgar describes the seriousness of this dilemma:

The basic problem with such an approach to translation is that the reader is handed over, bound hand and foot, to the translator’s interpretation without even a hint that it is merely the translator’s interpretation. He thinks he is reading a translation of God’s Word, when actually he is only reading what the translator thinks God meant, stated in the way the translator prefers. . . . There are numerous verses which are capable of differing interpretations. The reader, unless he can read Greek and Hebrew, does not know in a given verse whether he is reading a translation of God’s Word or the translator’s commentary. If he can read Greek or Hebrew, however, he does not need a “dynamic equivalent” translation. If he cannot read Greek and Hebrew, he cannot really trust a dynamic equivalent translation for any serious Bible study since he has no way to differentiate God’s Word from the translator’s commentary.¹⁸

With a formal equivalence translation, there is a much higher level of confidence because the translators are not communicating what they think is the meaning, but they are seeking to transfer the words as God has given them as much as possible.

¹⁸ Thomas Edgar, “The Word of God or Merely Equivalent?” *Reflections* 5 (Fall 1983).

What Is the Function of a Translation?

While we want a translation that is easily understandable, is it the responsibility of the translator to interpret and explain the meaning of every passage? William Einwechter makes a good point in his essay:

All translation involves some degree of interpretation. However, in the FE method, the element of interpretation is deliberately kept to a minimum. In FE, the role of the translator is not that of “an exegete who is interpreting the Bible for the church” (Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 106). Rather, “The proper role of the translator is to give the church an accurate translation upon which it may do exegesis” (Jakob van Bruggen, *The Future of the Bible*, p. 106). The FE view on interpretation and translation is well stated by Thomas:

In any work that is precisely called a translation, interpretation should be kept to a minimum. Otherwise, the role of the expositor is usurped, and the work becomes a commentary on the meaning of the text, not a translation into the closest equivalent of the receptor language . . . Commentaries are much needed, but it is a mistake to assume that a translation can function in that role without ceasing to be a translation . . . It is not the translator’s job to mediate between God’s Word and modern culture as the commentator and the expositor does (Robert L. Thomas, *Bible Translations: The Link between Exegesis and Expository Preaching*).¹⁹

The point is well taken. There is a place and purpose for interpreting and commenting on the meaning—we have and use many commentaries—but when one reads a commentary, he knows that is what it is, one man’s understanding of what God’s Word means. When you are reading the Bible, you want to know what God said, not just what someone thinks He meant. If we do not know what God said, how can we determine if the commentator interpreted it correctly or not?

Unintentional Changes in Meaning

With verbal inspiration, we believe that God carefully chooses every word and says things precisely as He wants to say them. It is doubtful that we can

¹⁹ William O. Einwechter, *English Bible Translations: By What Standard?*, p. 14

always fully grasp the significance of each word in its context. When the translator's primary focus is on the meaning of the verse and conveying that meaning in easily understandable English, instead of seeking the best equivalent of the words used, it can lead to unintended changes in meaning. God's Word is very precise as only God can be, but translators desiring to use colloquial English can overlook some detail and perhaps not even realize how they have changed the meaning.

In the example above from the CEV translation of Romans 3:20, it may not have been the intention of the translators to deny the first and third uses of the law, but that is the result of their translation, "All the Law does is to point out our sin." That says more than the simple, formal equivalence translation, "For by the law is the knowledge of sin" (NKJV). Is that really so difficult that it needs to be simplified? The more emphasis that is put on having colloquial English, the more danger there is of that type of change taking place.

Is not that another reason to keep functional equivalence to a minimum? Unnecessary changes in grammar and syntax open the door for more unintentional changes in meaning. Even the best of the functional equivalence translations have a shocking number of passages in which the form of the text is changed for no apparent reason. Nor does it dramatically improve the readability. Is that what we want in a translation? Let's consider an example.

Romans 13:1: Πᾶσα ψυχὴ ἐξουσίαις ὑπερεχούσαις ὑποτασσέσθω.

NIV 2011: *Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities.*

NKJV: *Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities.*

This translation conveys the meaning of the passage. It is not going to mislead anyone into any false doctrine. However, God chose to use the word ψυχὴ (soul) which the NIV simply ignored. Why? A literal translation such as the NKJV is just as easy to understand.

God could have used the pronoun "everyone" or even "every person," but He did not. He chose to call on every soul to be subject. We may not know why God chose that word, perhaps it was simply a common way of expressing "everyone" in Paul's day, but perhaps God wanted to emphasize that we are all spiritual beings and this is a spiritual matter. Since we have the same understanding of "every soul" in English, why change it? When a translator freely changes idioms into colloquial English idioms, he assumes that God had

no special purpose for saying it the way He did. Can we make that assumption? That is why the formal equivalence method seeks to preserve idioms unless they are completely unintelligible.

The NIV translators frequently change the grammatical construction of sentences and parts of speech for no apparent reason. One gets the impression that they change things just for the sake of change to justify a “new” translation. One might legitimately question whether that does show a high regard for the verbally inspired text. When we consider that God carefully chose every word and arranged the words for a specific reason, we ought to be very reluctant to change them unless this change is absolutely necessary to communicate in English.

Intentional Changes in Meaning?

We do not want to judge motives and intentions, but there are many more questionable changes that are difficult to see as unintentional or unimportant. Changing “Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” to “The Lord was pleased with Noah,” is not an accident. When a word is translated in a way that is not found in any lexicon, it is not an accident. When a very rare usage is the basis for a translation, but the context does not suggest such usage, it is not a legitimate use of functional equivalence. For example:

Ephesians 4:3: ΣΠΟΥΔΆΖΟΝΤΕΣ ΤΗΡΕΪΝ ΤΗΝ ΕΝΌΤΗΤΑ ΤΟΥ ΠΝΕΥΜΑΤΟΣ
ΕΝ ΤΩ ΣΥΝΔΕΣΜΩ ΤΗΣ ΕΙΡΗΝΗΣ

NKJV: . . . *endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*”

NIV 2011: *Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Prepositions are little words, but they are important in the meaning of a sentence. While the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon does list a causal force of ἐν, for example, “perish by the sword” and “redemption through Christ,” it is not the normal usage of ἐν. It needs to be clear from the context that such is the intended use. In this case it changes the meaning dramatically to say, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.” If our bond of peace with one another is the means to keep the unity of the Spirit, it might imply that for the sake of that bond or for the sake of “our beloved

synod” we ought to overlook some differences in order to keep that unity. That is the opposite of what God tells us to do: Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in that bond of peace.

The same word, σπουδάσων, that is translated “Make every effort” in the passage above, is translated “Do your best” in the NIV 2011 translation of 2 Timothy 2:15: *“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”* “Do your best” gives a very different impression than “be diligent to” (NKJV) or “make every effort to” (Ephesians 4:3 NIV 2011). Does not the English idiom, “Do your best,” have the connotation “if you try your best, that is good enough?” Does that give the same sense of urgency as “make every effort”?

Romans 15:5: ὁ δὲ θεὸς τῆς ὑπομονῆς καὶ τῆς παρακλήσεως δώη ὑμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν ἐν ἀλλήλοις κατὰ Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν

NIV 1978: *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.*

NIV 2011: *May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had,*

NASB: *Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus,*

NKJV: *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,*

ESV: *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,*

Having a “spirit of unity” is far different from the literal “to be of the same mind” (NASB). To be of the same mind speaks of complete unity, while others come short of that. The ESV translators were very free with “to live in such harmony with one another.” The NIV 2011 translation is an improvement from the older version, but adding the word “attitude” still falls short of the simple words of God.

Luke 11:28: αὐτὸς δὲ εἶπεν, μενοῦν μακάριοι οἱ ἀκούοντες τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ φυλάσσοντες.

NIV 2011: *“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.”*

To obey God’s Word may be included in the word φυλάσσοντες, but it greatly limits the meaning of the word and gives a very different thrust to the passage.

φυλάσσω means, “1) to guard, a) to watch, keep watch, b) to guard or watch, have an eye upon lest he escape, c) to guard a person (or thing) that he may remain safe lest he suffer violence, be despoiled, to protect, to protect one from a person or thing, to keep from being snatched away, preserve safe and unimpaired, to guard from being lost or perishing.”

That is much more than *obeying* the Word. It is to guard and keep it in one’s heart as something precious that one does not want to be lost or corrupted in any way.

Acts 11:2: ὅτε δὲ ἀνέβη Πέτρος εἰς Ἱερουσαλήμ, διεκρίνοντο πρὸς αὐτὸν οἱ ἐκ περιτομῆς

NKJV: *And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him,*

ESV: *So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying,*

NIV 2011: *So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him*

The NKJV translation is very literal, “those of the circumcision,” the ESV gives what appears to be a legitimate use of functional equivalence by calling them “the circumcision party.” But the NIV interjects something that is at best misleading, “circumcised believers.” Peter and the other apostles were circumcised believers, but this is clearly not talking about them. It is talking about Jews who wanted to accept Christ as the Messiah, but they were still denying the salvation by grace alone apart from the works of the law. Some of them may have come to understand the truth and become true believers, but the NIV translation wrongly has God testifying that these men were believers.

The Claim of Formal Equivalence Does Not Mean Everything Is Right

Just because a translation claims to use formal equivalence does not mean the translators always get it right. Thomas Nass in his review of the ESV points out that the ESV does not always live up to its claim to be an essentially literal translation. In many of the examples that he cited, the NIV was even further from the original form than the ESV. However, there are cases in which the ESV has done things with the text that do not seem justified. Consider a few examples.

Philippians 2:5: τοῦτο φρονεῖτε ἐν ὑμῖν ὃ καὶ ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ

ESV: *Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,*

NKJV: *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus,*

NIV 2011: *In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:*

There is a variant in the verb φρονέω in the first part of the verse, which explains the difference in active or passive but does nothing to explain how or where the ESV translators found “which is yours” in the text.

The NIV 2011 translators took the liberty to insert a whole phrase that is not in the original, which limits the admonition only to our relationships with one another. In the next verse, however, the NIV 2011 translators seem to have come up with a functional equivalent translation of that difficult verse which serves quite well: “Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage” (Philippians 2:6 NIV 2011).

Ephesians 5:9: ὁ γὰρ καρπὸς τοῦ Πνεύματος ἐν πάσῃ ἀγαθωσύνῃ καὶ δικαιοσύνῃ καὶ ἀληθείᾳ

ESV: *(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),*

NKJV: *(for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, righteousness, and truth),*

The difference between “fruit of *light*” (ESV) and “fruit of *the Spirit*” (NKJV) is due to a textual variant. However, there is no variant in the three nouns: ἀγαθωσύνη, δικαιοσύνη, ἀληθεία—goodness, righteousness, truth. The ESV changes them to adjectives, “good, right, true.”

The simple sentence in Greek translates well into English as the NKJV has it. Changing these nouns to adjectives requires adding several words that are not in the Greek. Does that really improve the readability? Does it really convey the same meaning? Does not that say the fruit of the light is found in the things that are good and right and true, whereas the Greek says that the fruit of the Spirit or light is the qualities of goodness, righteousness, and truth?

2 Timothy 3:14: Σὺ δὲ μένε ἐν οἷς ἔμαθες καὶ ἐπιστώθης, εἰδὼς παρὰ τίνων ἔμαθες,

NKJV: *But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.*

ESV: *But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.*

The ESV improves on the translation of the imperative “continue,” but the translators were not so faithful with ἐπιστώθης, which is a first aorist passive of πιστόω. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon gives the definition, “1. show oneself faithful. 2. feel confidence, be convinced of.”

Timothy was urged to “continue in the things which he had learned and been convinced of or assured of.” The ESV translation makes the passive verb active, “have firmly believed.” That might seem like a functional equivalent, if he was assured of it with the result that he firmly believed it. However, notice how that shifts the emphasis to his act of believing—his believing was firm, and that takes the emphasis away from the fact that the Word of God is sure and has the power to firmly convince us. This puts the emphasis on our believing rather than on the solid object of our faith. God used the passive for a purpose. Functional equivalence does not give us the liberty to change that.

The next verse poses even more troubles.

2 Timothy 3:15: καὶ ὅτι ἀπὸ βρέφους ἱερὰ γράμματα οἶδας, τὰ δυνάμενά σε σοφίσει εἰς σωτηρίαν διὰ πίστεως τῆς ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ.

NKJV: *And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

ESV: *And how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

NIV 2011: *and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*

There are two things to note in the ESV. First, “sacred writings” is an accurate translation of ἱερὰ γράμματα. The translators no doubt wanted to make a distinction from γραφή in the next verse, but the result is quite unfortunate. “Holy Scriptures” is a well-known and widely used expression specifically for the Bible. “Sacred writings” is commonly used to speak about many different religious writings. The Muslim Koran is considered a sacred writing as are the Hindu Vedas and many others. With that understanding of sacred writings in people’s minds, this translation could be very misleading. It could give support to the idea that all religions are equally valid and really lead to the same place.

Secondly, “have been acquainted with” is a very weak translation of οἶδας. The Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich lexicon defines οἶδας, “1. Know, 2. be (intimately) acquainted with, stand in a (close) relation to. To know God, i.e. not only to know theoretically of his existence, but to have a positive relationship with him, 3. know or understand how, can, be able. 4. understand, recognize, come to know, experience.”

Timothy was not just acquainted with the Scriptures, as if he had heard about them and knew a little about them. He knew the essence of the Holy Scriptures which made him wise for salvation. His knowledge grew as he grew and learned more, but it was more than a mere acquaintance. In these verses the NIV 2011 perhaps did the best of all three.

Additional Concerns

Some translations seem to interject a new interpretation, at other times they translate in such a way that multiple views are possible. One such example is the translation of 2 Peter 3:10.

2 Peter 3:10: Ἦξει δὲ ἡμέρα κυρίου ὡς κλέπτῃς ἐν νυκτί, ἐν ᾗ οἱ οὐρανοὶ ῥοιζηδὸν παρελεύσονται . . .

ESV: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar . . .*

NKJV: *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise . . .*

NIV 2011: *But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar . . .*

The NIV seems to skip over ἐν ᾧ—a feminine dative which refers back to ἡμέρα—without translating it. The ESV translators rendered it “and then.” The NKJV translation is “in which.” How this is translated makes a significant difference in end-time events. We do not know, nor can we judge, the motives of the translators, but the ESV translation certainly has the unfortunate effect of adding a temporal element to the verse which could be used to support millennial theology. Adding time into this verse is something which the Greek does not allow.

Another concern arises when translators seek to remove expressions that are unfamiliar to modern readers. They may make it easier to read, but often some treasure of meaning is lost in the process.

For example, the NIV has removed all references to “the LORD of hosts.” Instead they translate יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת as “the LORD Almighty.” That translation is not going to lead anyone astray in their faith, but it does lose something precious. It disposes of one of the names of God. We already have אֱלֹהֵי שָׁמַיִם “God Almighty.” יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת may imply that the Lord is almighty, but there is added comfort and reassurance to know that He is also the commander of all the angel armies as well as the Lord of the great host of believers.

Simplifying the language of the Bible to meet an average person’s reading ability is a worthy goal—it is what Martin Luther did with his translation. However, when that “simplification” goes so far as to omit something that God has written for our learning, it results in a poor translation. Such an oversimplified, richness-robbing translation is not what we want in our congregations or in our homes. Part of growing in the faith and knowledge of Scripture is learning to understand these expressions that are given for our strength and encouragement.

Conclusions

Translating is a difficult process. Every language has different ways of expressing things, so a strictly literal translation is not going to produce a good translation. Functional equivalence is a valuable tool in translating where the form of the original simply cannot be maintained with good results. When used properly, it is consistent with verbal inspiration. However, it is often abused in ways that are not at all consistent with verbal inspiration. When it is abused, we simply are not reading what God has said to us. That is a problem!

When functional equivalence is used as the primary method of translating, many liberties are taken that do make one question if the translators really have a high regard for the Scriptures as the very Word of God. In fact, the statement in the NIV falls short of confessing a belief in verbal-plenary inspiration. "In working toward these goals, the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form. They believe that it contains the divine answer to the deepest needs of humanity, that it sheds unique light on our path in a dark world, and that it sets forth the way to our eternal well-being."²⁰

There is no perfect translation, and there will always be differences of opinion about what is the best balance between formal and functional. In this writer's opinion, the best translation is one that uses formal equivalence as the primary method of translating and keeps functional equivalence to a minimum. Especially for careful Bible study and for doctrinal discussions, a functional equivalence translation is not adequate because important differences are found in small details. We want to know what God said and how He said it as closely as possible, because the accuracy and detail of truth in His words can be lost when the forms of speech are altered. We use the historical grammatical method of interpretation, so it makes sense to use a translation that preserves the grammatical form as much as possible.

Some prefer a translation that tends more toward functional equivalence for devotional use because of its ease of reading. For those who are not very familiar with the Bible, a functional equivalence translation will be easier to read and understand.

The ESV translators seem to have struck a balance between form and function, and for the most part the result is a flowing and readable translation.

²⁰ Preface to the *New International Version*, 1978 edition.

In many places the ESV is an improvement from the NKJV both in form and function. The careful observer, however, will notice that the ESV's "essentially equivalent" is not quite the same as the NKJV's "complete equivalence." The ESV translators do take more liberties and come up with some very questionable translations in a few places where one has to ask, "Why?"

The NIV translators take more liberties than others, leaving questions regarding its value as a primary translation. However, the NIV is certainly one of the best functional equivalence translations available and has many translations that are very helpful. It is valuable as a secondary translation for reference and comparison.

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Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod

C. F. W. Walther

The most honorable Dr. C. F. W. Walther had prepared the essay and had presented theses “On the Primary Duties Incumbent on a Synod That Wants Rightly to Be Considered an Evangelical Lutheran Synod.”

The theses read as follows:

Thesis I

Its primary duty is to be *faithful* to the *Confessions* in word and deed, and therefore it must without reservation confess the creeds of the Evangelical Lutheran Church; accept only pastors, teachers, and congregations that are faithful to the Confessions; supervise the confessional faithfulness of its members; practice fellowship only with church bodies that are faithful to the Confessions.

Thesis II

A second major duty is that it faithfully treat its *congregations* in an evangelical way, and therefore not assume a dictatorial role over them but only help them in an advisory way; assist them in acquiring upright (*rechtschaffener*) pastors and teachers; protect them against pastors who err in doctrine, follow an offensive life-style, and are domineering in their office.

Thesis III

A third major duty is that it support its *pastors and teachers*, and therefore counsel them; support them in the proper conduct of their office; defend them against unjust treatment.

Thesis IV

A fourth major duty is that it promote the growth of its members in *the knowledge of the truth* in every way possible, and therefore give priority to doctrinal discussions in arranging its conventions/conferences; arrange for both pastoral and teacher conferences, review their minutes, and evaluate them; make every effort to disseminate good literature.

Thesis V

A fifth major duty is that it strive for *peace and unity in the truth* in its midst, and therefore see to it; that all members are mutually submissive; that each bear the other's burden in brotherly love; that no unnecessary disputes arise and are continued, whether they have to do with doctrine or practice.

Thesis VI

A sixth major duty is that it not seek its own glory but only the *glory of God*, being intent not so much on its own growth but rather on the growth of Christ's kingdom and the salvation of souls, and therefore not employ dishonest means, but above all be intent on using the Gospel in all its purity and fullness to win souls and keep them; seek to produce in its members, not so much zeal for its particular community but rather living faith, unfeigned love, and genuine godliness; take an enthusiastic and, as much as possible, active part in all God-pleasing organizations dedicated to the spread of Christ's kingdom in the world.

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Book Review

David T. Lau

C. F. W. Walther: *Church Fellowship* (Walther's Works), Concordia Publishing House, 2015, hardcover, 417 pages, 12 preliminary pages.

This addition to the ongoing series of Walther's writings in English translation features sixteen articles or presentations of C. F. W. Walther (1811-1887), dating from 1857 to 1884. They are printed in chronological order. Some of them deal directly with the topic of church fellowship, such as his 1860 foreword to *Lehre und Wehre* (the theological journal that he founded) titled, *Do We Draw the Lines of Fellowship Too Narrowly?* (pp. 55-74), and an 1870 convention address on *Communion Fellowship* (pp. 145-192). The other essays or articles deal with the subject of church fellowship more indirectly, but certainly providing much background information for the position Walther took on fellowship issues. The informative introduction by Gerhard Bode provides the context for each of the sixteen items.

While striving for unity among the various Lutheran groups in America, Walther "sought to avoid union at the expense of pure doctrine and practice in keeping with that doctrine" (p. vii), says Bode in his introduction. Walther was a consistent opponent of both unionism—the union of churches in confessional disagreement, and syncretism—the blending of differing doctrines. He did not believe that God's word should ever be compromised for the sake of outward union. In this stance he followed in the footsteps of Martin Luther and the Lutheran confessions, particularly the *Formula of Concord* of 1577. This volume includes a short article published in 1877, *On the Three Hundredth Anniversary of the Formula of Concord* (pp. 217-236).

There is no doubt that Walther vigorously and even fiercely opposed those who claimed to be Lutherans but were not adamant about maintaining confessional Lutheran doctrine and practice. He could not go along with the followers of William Loehe in the Iowa Synod because of their acceptance of the theory of open questions. For this reason, Walther wrote a lengthy article on *The False Arguments for the Modern Theory of Open Questions*, which appeared in *Lehre und Wehre* in 1868 (pp. 95-141). Some of these "open questions" included millennialism, the doctrine of Sunday, the Antichrist, and church and ministry. The Iowa Synod maintained that allowance should be made for variations on these doctrines since either the Lutheran confessions had not drawn up a specific article on the topic, or prominent Lutheran

theologians of the past had differed in their teachings. Walther's view was that if Scripture teaches it, it is a doctrine that must be taught, and no alternative views can be allowed.

Walther could not agree with the General Council practice on communion fellowship, which opened up the Lord's Supper to those who were not agreed on the Lord's Supper or other Scriptural doctrines. For this reason the Missouri Synod and the sister synods of the Synodical Conference were unable to work together in confessional union with the many other Lutheran synods in America at that time.

The last article included in this volume is a lengthy essay presented to a Synodical Conference convention in 1884. It is titled, *Church Fathers and Doctrine* (pp. 351-412). The context of this essay is the predestination controversy which raged among American Lutherans at that time. Walther's opponents defended their view that it is permissible to teach that God predestined or elected individuals on the basis of their foreseen faith. In other words, they taught that faith is the cause of God's election, rather than the Bible's teaching that God's election is the cause of a person's coming to faith, as is taught clearly in Acts 13:48. Walther's opponents based their contention on the fact that many of the prominent Lutheran theologians in the age of orthodoxy had taught this "in view of faith" doctrine. They argued that since those church fathers were considered orthodox, Walther's opponents who taught similarly should be considered orthodox as well.

In this last article Walther makes some important points that are extremely useful for our doctrinal discussions today. He says:

"You should not believe even a word from us, your teachers, until you know that also Holy Scripture teaches it" (p. 385).

"I should be just as certain that my teaching is correct as I am certain that I am alive" (p. 388).

"There is no appeal from Scripture to a higher court" (p. 389).

"In matters of faith one should not depend even on believers" (p. 391).

As far as the so-called orthodox theologians are concerned—such as Hunnius, Hutter, and Gerhard—Walther says, "We indeed also follow these dear men in almost all teachings, but not in the few in which they depart from God's Word—above all, not in the doctrines of the election of grace, of the Sabbath, and of the power of the government in churchly affairs" (p. 400).

Walther did not believe that the *Book of Concord* departed from Scripture or added to Scripture, and he was even willing to say that Martin Luther himself did not err doctrinally after a certain point in his life.

In faithfulness to Walther's teaching on the church fathers, we must not put Walther himself on a pedestal and claim that everything he taught must be accepted as on a par with Scripture. He would disagree vehemently with such a view. There are some remarks that he makes on church fellowship that are questionable. His view on communing lodge members differs from the view of later Synodical Conference teachers. He makes membership in a lodge a matter of weakness of behavior rather than a matter of supporting false doctrine. He emphasizes the stubbornness and obstinacy of false teachers as a factor in determining whether fellowship should be terminated, whereas false teaching can be spread by mild-mannered and polite individuals also and be just as dangerous. Walther would not want us to listen to him as the final judge in such matters. He would advise us to find our teaching in the Scriptures and alone in the Scriptures.

Included in this volume are two essays that are certainly worthy of careful consideration. *Duties of an Evangelical Lutheran Synod* (pp. 237-336)¹ was delivered to the first Iowa District convention in 1879. In this essay Walther explains six theses which present what he considers the six chief duties of a confessional Lutheran synod. It would be wise to check our synodical activities today against his theses to see whether we are weak or failing in one area or another. In 1872, Walther defended sixteen theses to an English Lutheran conference with the title, *Summary of Christian Doctrine* (pp. 193-216). The editors say that "the theses were originally delivered in English" and that "they reveal that Walther put into practice his belief that unity of faith must precede and serve as the foundation for any fellowship between Lutheran communions" (p. 193).

The writings of Walther are worth reading and studying. He lived at a different time and dealt with some issues that we do not face. But the issues of unionism and syncretism are still with us, in fact, to a greater extent than Walther would have believed possible. The state of Lutheranism in our country and in the world is deplorable. All Lutheran theologians, pastors, and laymen can learn very much about faithful leadership and Lutheran confessionalism from this volume, which is highly commended.

¹ These theses are reprinted on pp. 40-41 in this issue of the *Journal of Theology*.