Functional equivalence: Eugene Nida's theory, its challenge for Bible Translation, and its theological burden

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Abstract: The paper describes and evaluates the theory of Nida's translation approach, its significance and its shortcomings.

Keywords: Literal translation, functional equivalence, dynamic equivalence, accuracy, theological critique.

1. Significance of Nida's work and writing[1] for the development of Bible translation

Over the past 60 years, a process unprecedented in the history of Bible translation has taken place. An explosion of new translations has expanded the once far narrower range, with many of them straying far from their source text.[2] It was Eugene Albert Nida (1914–2011) who instigated a great deal of this development. He came to be revered as "the world's most influential Bible translator"[3] despite never publishing his own translations.[4] His optimistic theory maintains that the meaning of a text can be captured through "basic kernels," or kernel sentences, and thus be conveyed from one language to another with minimum loss. In a public address, Simon Crisp, former Director of Translation Services of the United Bible Societies, has likened this to a "revolution." Nida developed a simple but highly effective explanatory model which gained worldwide acceptance among prominent Bible translators.[5]

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[1] Titles of Nida's works are given in abbreviated manner, according to the year of publication and the first letter(s) of its main words, e.g. "1954cc" for *Customs and Cultures* (1954). See list of references.

[2] One example, taken from one of the most popular new translations, the condensed and theologically concise *summary* "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" (Mark 1:4 KJV) is now rendered in an entirely different form, namely as a sermon *quotation*. Each individual component is turned into its own short phrase. Nothing is left to be desired in terms of clarity; however, the connection between repentance/justification and the sacrament is lost: "Change yourselves from the ground up and turn to God, so that He can forgive your sins. Be baptized by me!" Translated from *Hoffnung für alle* 1983: "Ändert euch von Grund auf, und kehrt um zu Gott, damit er euch eure Sünden vergeben kann. Laßt euch von mir taufen!".

[3] Christianity Today 7.10.2002, 46 (http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/011/2.46.html, 29.10.2008).

[4] "Lecturers and writers frequently refer to me as a Bible translator who learned something about linguistics and translating. But I have never translated a chapter of the Bible for publication, nor have I ever been a member of a translating committee. I am simply a linguist specializing in language and cultural anthropology, and because of this I was invited by the American Bible Society to find out why so many of their publications of the Scriptures were so seldom read and so frequently misunderstood. I accepted the challenge of trying to find out why people have so much trouble in understanding biblical texts, but in the process I have written and lectured more in secular settings than in specifically religious contexts [!]. I am simply a student of sociolinguistics and semiotics who has been studying verbal [!] communication in more than ninety countries and who continues to be fascinated by languages" (2003f, 135 [emphasis mine], directly under the heading "Who am I?"). See also Elena Nida, Profile, 21.

[5] Crisp, Challenges, 201f. Many others speak similarly of a "revolution": North, Appreciation, x; Stine, Assessment, 2004, 469; ibid., Lasting Influence, 2004, vii + 2; Charles H. Kraft in the preface to Nida's 1990m, vii: "The contemporary revolution in Bible translation theory and practice owes a greater debt to Nida than to any other single individual." Also cited in Robertson, 50 Years UBS, 58, and by the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship (www.nidainstitute.org/vsItemDisplay.dsp&objectID=0920A817-28AA-4D6F-9B9F700 12FE3A462&method=display, 16.2.2009); finally Longenecker, Quo vadis?, 343 (with superlatives added). The United Bible Societies (UBS) had been committed to

Similar verdicts were passed in the secular domain: the Linguistic Society of America considers Nida to be "one of the most effective spokespersons for the field of linguistics that the world has ever known."[6] His book *Toward a Science of Translation* (1964) is regarded as the beginning of translation studies in its narrower sense[7] – as the "bible" not only for Bible translation, but also for translation in general.[8]

New translations flooded the market, modeled after his theory and/or according to Living Bible and Good News Bible. According to Velten, it was in the USA – the birthplace of dynamic-equivalent translation – that the resulting "crowding out" was first apparent (as of 1977)[9]:

- Living Bible: 23 million copies
- Good News Bible: 10 million copies
- American Standard Bible: 10 million copies
- New English Bible: 9 million copies[10]

Current figures for the *German Bible market* are not readily available but can be collated from data scattered throughout relevant literature. The German Bible Society (especially: Lutherbibel, Gute Nachricht Bibel) sold:

- 1971–1984: over 2 million copies of the *Neue Testament in heutigem Deutsch* (New Testament in contemporary German).[11]
- 1982–1996: around 3.9 million copies of the *Gute Nachricht Bibel* (Good News Bible) – 2.7 million copies of the complete Bible and 1.2 million copies of the New Testament.[12]

Half a million copies of the German *Gute Nachricht Bibel* 1982 were sold in its first year alone. Much effort went into its success: over 200 agencies, media outlets, and radio and television stations were provided with comprehensive information prior to its publication.[13] Over 200,000 copies of the revised *Gute Nachricht Bibel* were distributed in 1997, its year of publication. The edition was top of idea's list of bestselling religious books for months.[14] The *Gute Nachricht* was also extremely popular in the former GDR from the outset – i.e. since the *Gute Nachricht für Sie–NT '86* was published in 1967.

The German Bible Society no longer publishes figures on account of the new market situation.[15] Brunnen[16] Publishing Basel revealed that around 1.14 million copies of the complete *Hoffnung für alle* ("hope for all", the second major dynamic equivalent translation in German) were sold between

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dynamic equivalence for years, as stated by the UBS Translation Services Coordinator Phil Noss (UBS 2000). – Cf. D. France, Overview, 189: "Bible translation has entered a quite new phase since 1960"; 193: "But in fact virtually all English versions of the last half century have accepted the principle of translating idiom for idiom rather than word for word ..."

[6] Homepage of the Linguistic Society of America (www.lsadc.org/info/lsa-award-more.cfm, 27.1.2009).

[7] Koller, Übersetzungswissenschaft, 60.

[8] Gentzler, Contemporary Translation, 44.

[9] Velten, Hochkonjunktur, 220. The KJV is unfortunately missing; according to the ABS it was still outperforming its closest competitor threefold in 1969 (Daniell, Bible in English, 840).

[10] Until translation of the New Testament was completed in 1970: 7 million (Daniell, Bible in English, 751).

[11] Frankemölle, Bibel und heutiger Leser, 119.

[12] Haug, Gute Nachricht, 32. In a newsletter from 18.6.2012, the German Bible Society reports 2.5 million copies of the complete Bible (http://www.dbg.de/navi/themen_/jubilaeum/das-nt-68-der-gute-nachricht, 18.06.2012, with concise details of the revisions).

[13] Müller, Funktion, 244.

[14] Jahr, Neue Gute Nachricht, 12 (Foreword).

[15] Correspondence from July 12 and 14, 2010.

[16] Renamed Fontis in 2014.

its publication in 1996 and mid-2010. Figures for partial Bibles (primarily the New Testament) have not been issued.[17] The average annual sale over a period of 14 years was just over 80,000 copies.

There was some renaissance of the source-oriented translations in the American market from the 1990s on, but this has never been replicated in the Germanophone markets.

2. Nida's favorite translation example: Mark 1:4

"If one were in any doubt as to the influence of Eugene Nida in worldwide Bible translating, one would only have to compare the translation of Mark 1:4 in pre-1970 and post-1970 versions (e.g. in the English, German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Indonesian, Malay)."[18] This suggestion from the dissertation of Bishop A.H. Nichols shall be taken up here. A comparison of translations of this text can be taken to represent Nida's influence on the work of translators, since he used it to illustrate his theory repeatedly for many decades.[19] Here we will examine in short, how his influence has been demonstrated by *translations* since the 1960s. A synopsis of translations of the passage is given in the appendix of my book "Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung" ("Communicative Translation of the Bible").

While the verse may seem simple at first glance, Nida and Bratcher considered it to be one of the most challenging of the entire gospel. The problem arises from the phrase βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν– literally "a baptism of repentance for remission of sins." The whole phrase is, in Nida and Bratcher's view, the direct object of the participle κηρύσσων, and thus describes the content of John's preaching.[20] However, all four nouns describe processes – i.e. the author of the gospel supposedly links four processes in an extremely succinct manner. The challenge of translating of the phrase lay in the fact that other languages tend to describe *processes with verbs* rather than with nouns. Nida and Bratcher pointed out that if these nouns (baptism, repentance, etc.) are replaced with verbs, they must also be *assigned the correct subjects*: the baptism is carried out by John, the repentance by the people, and the remission by God, and the sins again have the people as their subject.[21] Finally, according to Nida and Bratcher, it must be ensured that the processes are correctly related to one another. They suggested that one of the easiest ways of doing this is to construct a **time sequence** of repentance – baptism – remission, "e.g. 'preached that the people should repent and be baptized' or 'preached that the people should be sorry on account of their sins and be baptized' (Trique)". The other way would be to say that baptism is only for those who have repented, "e.g. 'whoever has changed his mind, he ought to be baptized …' (Balinese)."

Nida and Bratcher also noted a further complication that arises from the relationship between κηρύσσων and the rest of the sentence, as many languages require direct rather than indirect speech.

> "That is to say, one must render this passage as, 'John preached, You must repent and be baptized
> ...' If then, we put the entire second clause together, it could be rendered in the indirect form as

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[17] Correspondence from July 15, 2010.

[18] Nichols, Critical Analysis, 60.

[19] For a list of references from 1950 to 1984, see my 2016 "Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung", p. 44. A critique of Nida's comments on the passage is found in Crisp, Challenges, 202–204. – The epilogue of the 1982 *Gute Nachricht Bibel* still explicitly indicated Nida's theory as its basis; the 1997 revision has an almost identical afterword, but points to a booklet by Hellmut Haug on *Deutsche Übersetzungen: Das gegenwärtige Angebot* ("German Translations: The Current Range", 1993ff.), where *Mark 1:4* also serves as an example text. *Both* editions of the *Gute Nachricht Bibel* declare themselves to be dynamic equivalent (or after Haug, p. 6: communicative) translations, despite the clearly greater degree of literality in the 1997 edition.

[20] 1961m, 11.

[21] Ibid., 15.

'John preached that the people should repent and be baptized so that their sins would be forgiven' (changes into the direct form would be more or less automatic). On the other hand, in languages which have no passive forms of the verbs, the problems are even more complex, for the subjects of the corresponding active verbs must be introduced and the resultant translation may be roughly parallel to, 'preached that the people should repent and he would baptize them so that God would forgive the bad deeds which they had committed.'"[22]

Since Nida's premises facilitated an intellectual *climate* that came to operate independently of him, comparing his comments on particular *verses* with their translations may seem an inadequate means of gauging his influence on the development of worldwide translation activity. Even so, it should be apparent from this introduction that translation into European languages, as well as into third world languages, has experienced a change since the 1960s which, although not monocausal, can be clearly linked to Nida's principles.

Nida's suggestion that the chain of nouns be changed into a series of verbs with explication of their subjects resulted in the lengthening of European-language translations, as shown by word count statistics for Mark 1:4:

a) Greek text: 13
b) German-language translations/renderings:
  - Bruns 1961ff.:   24
  - Zink 1965:   38
  - *Gute Nachricht für Sie* 1967:   30
  - *Gute Nachricht* 1982:   31
  - *Hoffnung für alle* 1983:   42 (max.)
  - *Lutherbibel* 1984 (= 1975):   17
  - *Elberfelder Bibel* 1993:   18
  - *Neue Genfer Übersetzung* 2000:   28
  - *Hoffnung für alle* 2002:   37
  - *Neues Leben* 2002:   40
  - *Volxbibel* 2005:   37
  - *Das Buch* 2009:   34
c) English-language translations/renderings:
  - *New English Bible* 1961/70:   24
  - *Good News Bible* 1966:   30
  - *Living Bible* 1971:   37 (max.)
  - *New International Version* 1975/84:   20
  - *Good News Bible* 1994:   27
  - John Henson 2004:   31
  - *New Living Translation* 2004:   32

Nida's proposal also had a *disambiguating* effect, as exemplified by Bratcher's rendering in the *Good News Bible* 1966: "So John appeared in the desert, baptizing people and preaching his message. 'Turn away from your sins and be baptized,' he told the people, 'and God will forgive your sins.'" Here, as in numerous other translations, the verbalization suggests a sequence of acts. The noun structure of

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[22] Ibid., 16. Cf. Nida's suggestion in 1952n, 102: "preached that people should repent and be baptized so that their sins might be forgiven."

the traditional translations, by contrast, read a theological simultaneity of the processes involved without establishing the sequence psychologically. *Gute Nachricht* 1967 states:

Gute Nachricht **1967**	*Gute Nachricht* **in English**
"Er sagte zu den Menschen: 'Ändert euch und laßt euch taufen, *dann* wird Gott euch eure Schuld vergeben.'"[23]	"He said to the people: 'Change yourselves and be baptized, *then G*od will forgive your sin.'"

Berger/Nord 1999 also closely follow Nida's verbalization guidelines,[24] and BasisBibel 2006 still makes the elemental clauses distinguishable, now loosely juxtaposed.

It can be seen overall that even translations from the early post-war years, which sought to take a distinctively new approach to translation, were still narrowly limited in their variation.[25] The chain of nouns "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins" is recognizable in all instances, even in Christa von Viebahn's deliberately "free rendering" (1952). The first two nouns were verbalized by Hans Bruns in 1961. Consistent implementation of Nida's and Bratcher's guidelines is found from Jörg Zink 1965 onward, according to my survey of translations. It is naturally found in Bratcher's *Good News Bible/Today's English Version* 1966, as well as in other dynamic-equivalent translations.

Nida's and Bratcher's thinking was largely shaped in relation to non-European languages, but has been and is applied to many languages with long literary and translational traditions. The consequences are clear: translations become longer, they explicate more – and in this respect they increase in clarity. At the same time, more and more of the translators' (and translation committees') theology is poured in – and in this regard they can decrease in reliability.

3. Key concepts und continuity of Nida's theory of translation

"In analyzing translation, one must begin with a satisfactory model of <u>communication</u>."[26] Referring to Nida's theory of translation in the singular is justified by the consistent presence of its key concepts in all his publications.[27] This section seeks to systematize the essential ideas from which Nida's theory

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[23] Cf. Living Bible 1971, *Gute Nachricht*, and the later revised editions of *Hoffnung für alle*, Contemporary English Version 1995, *La Bible en français courant* 1997, *La Bible du Semeur* 1999, The Message 2003.

[24] This is based on the same or at least a very similar theory of translation; cf. the preface to Berger/Nord (1999, p. 21): "… Sometimes *one and the same* text has to … be translated differently for different communicative purposes. This is the principle of 'function-oriented' or 'functional' translation. How a text is translated … depends on what is to be achieved through the translation – what communicative 'function' the target text should have for recipients in the target culture. Interestingly, the less the source text is changed, the less possible it is to 'preserve the function.' In other words, if the function is to be preserved, the form of the text must often undergo significant change. This is easily seen, for example, in the translation of book titles or advertisement materials" (emphasis B.N.)! The authors then explicitly reject W. Wils's view that different criteria must be applied to the translation of biblical texts than to the translation of literary or technical texts (ibid., 21f.). Their translation of Rom. 1:17 reads: "Through my preaching a person may be made acceptable to God as righteous, if he believes the Gospel." ["Durch meine Verkündigung wird es möglich, daß ein Mensch für Gott als gerecht annehmbar wird, wenn er dem Evangelium glaubt."]

[25] This also applies to the English-speaking world: "Though the RSV was regarded by some as representing the avant-garde at the time of its publication, more recent developments show it to be quite traditional in its method of translation and in its retention of archaisms" (Lewis, English Bible, 128).

[26] 1981mc, 5.

[27] Stine, Lasting Influence, 152.

developed quite steadily over the decades. The following enumeration corresponds to Nida's own thinking as expressed in many of his writings, such as *Language, Culture, and Translation* (1993l) or *Meaning Across Cultures* (1981mc):

1. *The theory of Bible translation is a specific instance of and subordinated to general theories of language, communication, and translation.*
   The following points therefore focus on how language is understood, especially since all theories of translation are dependent on their understanding of language.[28]
2. *Written and spoken language is communication* (functions, code, dynamics).
3. *Languages mirror their respective culture(s)* (equivalence of languages, dependence of meanings on contexts).
4. *All linguistic symbols can be arranged into four semantic classes* (kernel sentences, universals).
   From this follows the methodology of translation.

A theory of translation in general:

It is based firstly and importantly on a theory of communication.[29] Nida (1964) was the first to point out that translating is not merely a problem involving two different languages. Seeking to grasp the dynamism of this communicative process with its situational and subjective variables, he introduced the concept of 'dynamic equivalence' into the general theory of translating and thus not only advanced translation science but also brought it a good deal closer to practice.[30]
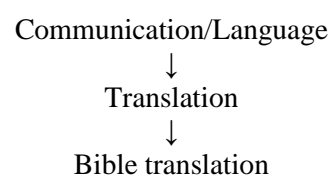
Communication/Language
↓
Translation
↓
Bible translation

Fig 1. Theory of communication

Nida saw the theory of Bible translation as part of a *general theory* of communication (understood as the transmission of information among several parties in at least one direction) and translation. Ch. 9 of *Message and Mission* is accordingly entitled "Scripture Translation and Revision *as* Techniques of Communication."[31] For Nida, Bible translation has neither a specific theory of its own nor a theologically or philosophically derived basis; there are only general, sociolinguistic principles that apply to the craft of translation. According to these principles, a translation must firstly adapt to the particularities of its receptors and secondly to those of its source text if it is to communicate effectively. "Nida has thoroughly transformed a field that was traditionally attributed to scholars … by applying the same standards of effectiveness that drive pragmatic translation," one critic opines.[32] "Translating means communicating."[33] "The same general principles of translating apply to Scriptures as they do to any secular document, but there are special problems"[34] – and the specific principles then stated by Nida similarly apply to other ancient documents (such as those of the church fathers).[35] The subtitle "With Special Reference to Bible Teaching" could therefore be omitted from the unrevised later edi-

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[28] Cf. Kelly, True Interpreter, 4.

[29] Pattemore, Framing Nida, 221.

[30] Salevsky, General Theory, 102.

[31] 1960 = 1990m (Ch. 9 in both editions of the book; emphasis mine). The text remained unchanged; only the original Bible quotation was taken from the GNB instead of the RSV as before.

[32] Simon, Délivrer la Bible, 431.

[33] 1993l, 116, see also the titles of 1977t.

[34] 1986f, 185.

[35] Ibid., 185–187: cultural and temporal distance; no longer possible to consult the authors; small text base for individual authors, therefore little potential for discerning stylistic patterns; absence of paralinguistic factors (feedback); wide range of genres; great historical significance; emotional involvement of translators and receptors. Specific aspects of theology in the Bible therefore play no part in the translation process.

tions (1974, 2003) of *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969tp), which is Nida's most frequently quoted, reprinted, and translated work.[36] Nida himself lamented that his theory of translation was sometimes understood to have been derived from the Bible, rather than being seen as the product of his linguistic and anthropological training[37]:

> "Unfortunately many people assumed that my concepts of translation developed as a result of working on biblical texts, but my ideas about translation were formulated years earlier while a Greek Major at the University of California at Los Angeles. I was introduced to the writings of such persons as Sapir, Bloomfield, Pedersen, and Malinowski. I therefore saw no reason why the everyday Koine Greek of the New Testament should not be translated into the everyday level of languages spoken throughout the world."[38]

On the relationship between Nida's theory and his experience with languages and Bible translation around the world,[39] see the following interview from a Chinese journal, given in October 1997:

> "JFL: Some people say that your theories concerning translating are built on your experience gained in translating the Bible. What do you think about such statements?
> Nida: I can well understand why people would think this, but in fact my basic principles about translation developed long before I worked with Bible transla-tors. On the basis of my studies in the Classics at UCLA I was amazed to find that for most part the Greek and Latin authors had been much more intelligibly translated than the Bible. Furthermore, my professors refused to have us produce literal translations since in their judgment such translations would inevitably result in students' failing to appreciate the style of the Greek and Latin texts. In addition, literal translations also result in bad habits in writing one's own language. My graduate work in Patristics at the University of Southern California and later doctoral studies at the University of Michigan in linguistics and cultural anthropology further convinced me that for the most part Bible translating falls far behind other translating in intelligibility of content and acceptability of style. After being asked by the American Bible Society to give assistance to Bible translators in many different parts of the world, I quite naturally employed illustrative data from the Scriptures since these would be much more convincing and helpful, but the basic principles of accurate representation of form and content were developed considerably before my work with Bible translators."[40]

In the preface to the 2003 reprint of *Toward a Science of Translating* (1964), Nida again refutes the misconception that he was primarily a Bible translator who had become interested in linguistics. "In reality, however, I was trained as a linguist and anthropologist."[41]

In an autobiographical memoire from 2003, he also describes his 1969tp as "one of the most helpful volumes on how to deal with crucial contrasts in the meaning of biblical languages."[42] Taken together,

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[36] The continuity of Nida's thought can also be shown by comparing the two editions of *Message and Mission* (1960 and 1990): all chapters are retained unchanged, including the sections on theological foundations and "Diverse Types of Translations" (1990: p. 139ff., 1960: p. 191ff.). The only changes are a few alterations to the layout, such as the incorporation of endnotes in the main body of text and a slightly extended bibliography. Worth noting, if anything, is the bringing forward of the chapter on theological foundations (ch. 10 becomes ch. 2). The only change to the list of best-known English translations is the addition of the NIV in the 1990 edition – a modest extension considering how many new Bible translations which follow Nida's theory have appeared since then (1990: 149, 1960: 199). Even temporal details were not updated ("recently" 1990: 151, 1960: 201; "present" 1990: 229, 1960: 14; "now": 1990: 238, 1960: 20).

[37] To my knowledge Nida never received formal theological training.

[38] 2001ct, 93.

[39] E.g. Johnson, Good News for the 20th Century; Nichols, Critical Analysis, 11. Ma also makes the same mistake (Theory, 221, see also 2 and 57): "Nida's translation theory has grown out of his experience of providing practical guidance for Bible translators."

[40] 1998i, 1 (italics in original, spacing mine).

[41] 2003t, ix (new preface to the reprint). – An example of the misconception: Dollerup, Nida and Translation Studies, 85.

[42] 2003f, 74.

these statements endorse the methodological right, with some differentiation, to 1. portray the development of Nida's theory of translation as essentially continuous and unruptured, and 2. see his approach as fundamentally empirical and secular in accordance with his own perspective. In *Fascinated by Languages* (2003f), the subject which Nida propounds with great enthusiasm and from many different angles is neither the Bible nor church preaching. His main theme is rather languages, and more specifically the (target) languages that are spoken and written today.

Language as communication

The continuity of Nida's theory is characterized from at least the late 1950s/early 1960s by a *communicative imperative*,[43] i.e. the notion that written or spoken texts are a linguistic *code*[44] *which seeks to communicate a "message" or "meaning."* Nida treats all functions of language as *communicative* functions,[45] resulting in prioritization of the *informative* and *imperative* functions. This seems to have remained the case until at least the 1970s. Nida introduces an increasing number of communicative functions over the decades: originally three in 1947b, five in 1977,[46] seven (including universals[47]) or eight in 1985/86,[48] and eventually nine.[49] Later Nida attributes little more than a share of 15 or 20% of the whole communication to the informative function, stating that the imperative, emotive, performative, and interpersonal functions are "often" far more important than the informative.[50] However, this language statistics-based evaluation differs from Nida's understanding of the "dynamic-equivalent"; for this he considers the informative, expressive, and especially imperative functions of language, and thus also of translation, to be central.[51] "Words have meanings only because they relate to behavior; but behavior may be extremely diverse and complex."[52]

Applying this to the phrase "the Word of God," Nida prioritizes the informative and imperative aspects. This biblical term, in his view, "refers primarily to the *message* that comes from God as a revelation, but for many people the phrase 'the word of God' is simply the Bible." He sees this as a

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[43] Term slightly modified following Hempelmann, Grundfragen, 5.

[44] Alongside other codes such as clothing and gesture, etc. There is rarely just one type of code involved in communication (1984ss, 14).

[45] 1984ss, 23ff. and 1986f, 25ff.: expressive, cognitive, egocentric, informative, performative, emotive, phatic, metalinguistic. Nida later tried to classify linguistic functions according to their psychological and sociological associations (five functions each), i.e. according to object- and person-related communication (1993l, 8ff.). The semantic classes given below in 2.1.4 (p. 158ff.) are listed as psychological functions, but almost all of the examples (ibid., 10) concern the sociological dimension. – On Karl Bühler's influence on Nida's description of linguistic functions see Nichols, Critical Analysis, 52f.

[46] Nichols, Critical Analysis, 53.

[47] 1986f, 25ff; Statham, Evolution, 39.

[48] 1985t, 124; 1986sl, 15, 47. – Ibid., 16: "The informative function in communication is usually regarded as the dominant one, but it is unlikely that information comprises more than fifteen to twenty percent of most verbalization. Its purpose is to change the cognitive state of receptors, while the imperative function of communication is to influence the behavioral response, and the performative function is designed to modify the state of receptors, as in the case of marriage rights or judicial sentencing." Cf. 1994st, 191: "These different functions, sometimes referred to as informative, interpersonal, expressive, performative, emotive, and imperative, are primarily sociolinguistic in that they relate to the use of language and not to its structure."

[49] 2008r, 50.

[50] 1986f, 29; 1993l, 13; 1996si, 40 (p. 41f. also speaks of the "recreational use of language," with reference to a game of Scrabble or crossword puzzles).

[51] "This imperative function, the most important for Nida" (Simon, Délivrer la Bible, 430, quoting 1969tpe, 24).

[52] 2003lac, 158.

typical (although not to be encouraged!) shift in meaning from the nonphysical to the physical sense – from the message to the book.[53] (And, of course, he wants to reverse that shift.)

Applied to translation, the function of a text in a source language context should be translated to yield an equivalent function in the target language context.[54] This can be taken as a description of "functional equivalence" (at least since 1986f[55]) and an expansion of "dynamic equivalence": the receptor of a translation should understand and respond as the receptor of the original did. This also explains the name of the theory: "dynamic" refers to the effect (or impact, appeal[56]) which the sender intended the communication to have on the receptor. The author(s) of the original wanted to be understood – therefore the translation must also be understandable if it is to be rightfully called a translation. "In other words, a translation should communicate."[57] "The criterion of 'closest natural equivalent' is the touchstone of faithful translation – the guarantee of both accuracy and acceptability, a principle of communication in which form gives way to meaning and content has priority over structures."[58]

Relating the translation to the receptor – to his presumed understanding and response – thus takes priority over its relation to the original. Only that which truly reaches the receptor, i.e. that is understood and elicits a response appropriate to what has been conveyed, is considered to have been communicated. Anything that does not reach the receptor (and therefore does not "work") is considered not to have been communicated. Communication is (acc. to Nida) always subjective and always a successful process – otherwise it does not take place. What applies to communication also applies to translation, and by extension to Bible translation.

> If a rendering is not understood correctly by those for whom it has been prepared, it is obviously not a correct rendering, no matter how much formal equivalence may exist between the corresponding expressions in the source and receptor languages. … It would be a serious mistake to assume that all receptors … are essentially alike. Varying educational levels, occupations, and interests greatly affect the ability of people to understand a message. Accordingly, it may be necessary to prepare quite different translations of the same text …[59]

Nida's tireless work was driven by a desire to communicate effectively. In his view, putting words together which the reader is unable to understand has "no purpose."[60] If a person cannot communicate effectively, he or she will fail to understand whom he is talking to and fail to reach his readers. "Perhaps the greatest obstacle to understanding other peoples lies in failure to communicate effectively"[61]

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[53] 1986f, 116. This implies that it is not the individual words and letters of the text that are inspired, but rather their translatable content. Nida therefore understands the Words of Institution symbolically; in his view, a literal understanding denotes a lack of understanding of *fundamentally religious language*. The main cause is a deficient appreciation of the value and *function of linguistic signs*. For example, in the Words of Institution "bread" is an *iconic sign*, similar to a person looking at a picture and saying, "That is a horse." "This is my blood" is an *iconic sign* for the death of Jesus and a symbol of the covenant. "As an iconic sign, the statement *this is my body* would be understood in the sense of 'this represents my body,' and this is one of the typical meanings of the Greek verb *estin*" (118, emphasis in original; cf. 23; on *iconic relation* see also 1993l, 48f.).

[54] "The term equivalence must, therefore, be understood in a broad sense of 'having essentially the same function' although never possessing an identical function" (1995d, 225).

[55] E.g. 1993l, 35.

[56] On the difference between *impact* and *appeal*: 1985t, 124; 1995d, 225.

[57] 1986f, 10f., cf. 46 ("fully understandable").

[58] 1977g, 109 (emphasis mine).

[59] 1976tc, 68, very similar in 1977g, 105.

[60] 1947b, 248f.

[61] 1954cc, 16. The most common cause of errors in translation, according to Nida, is the attempt to preserve formal correspondence (1985t, 124).

– and Nida's greatest ambition was to overcome misunderstandings and barriers to communication.[62] The means for this were supplied first and foremost by linguistics. *Through Nida's work, translation came to be seen as more than a philological process, rather, as a linguistically and sociologically comprehensible process of communication*. The leading discipline in translation is no longer philology, but rather linguistics and sociolinguistics – a now common term which was probably first used by Nida (in his *Morphology*).[63] He believed that effective communication requires adaptation of the language level (vocabulary, style, sentence lengths) to the target audience. The central term for this is the "closest natural equivalent."[64]

> But ultimately the adequacy of the translation must be judged in terms of the way people respond to it. Or to express the same idea from a different perspective: had Paul written directly for us and not for his contemporary audience, he would doubtless have said the same things in different ways. And the differences would not only have been linguistic.[65]

> Translating means communicating, and this process depends on what is received by persons hearing or reading a translation. Judging the validity of a translation cannot stop with a comparison of corresponding lexical meanings, grammatical classes, and rhetorical devices. What is important is the extent to which receptors correctly understand and appreciate the translated text. Accordingly, it is essential that functional equivalence be stated primarily in terms of a comparison of the way in which the original receptors understood and appreciated the text and the way in which receptors of the translated text understand and appreciated the translated text.[66]

Dynamic and functional

Some of Nida's later works, including *From One Language to Another* (1986f)[67] and *Contexts in Translating* (2001ct), no longer discuss the controversial equivalence of *reactions* among the addressees of translations. In fact, 1986f not only lacks this specific aspect of *dynamic* equivalence, but also adopts a different approach incongruent with that of 1969tp. Among those to point this out was the former UBS translation consultant Nigel Statham (Fiji), who wrote two essays calling for clarification of terms.[68] According to Statham, a top-down approach, which assumes knowledge of rhetorical functions and of the entire communicative event (1986f), replaces a bottom-up approach, which does not make this assumption and analyzes smaller grammatical units for didactic purposes (1969tp).[69] Statham sees reminiscences of 1969tp in Ch. 2 of 1986f as "inconsistent with the thrust of FOLTA" (i.e. 1986f) or as "methodological fossils"[70] from 1969tp. He draws attention to significant discrepancies,

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[62] 1969tpe/d, 1. A "great fear of misunderstandings, … fear that a reader might come to his own conclusions that are inconsistent with evangelical doctrine," Stolze states (Bibelübersetzung, 365), also with regard to the *Neue Genfer Übersetzung*.

[63] According to the Oxford English Dictionary (cited in Stine, Lasting Influence, 147, which also references R.W. Burchfield, A Supplement to the Oxford English Dictionary, Oxford, 1987). The term "sociological linguistics" is nonetheless clearly older, cf. John R. Firth 1937 (after Alheit, Soziolinguistik, 41).

[64] E.g. in 1969tpd, 11 and 12; 1969tpe, 12 and 13 (more references in my 2016 Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung, 147).

[65] 1969tpd, 23, footnote 1 (1969tpe, 23f. footnote).

[66] 1993l, 116.

[67] After Doty, Paradigm Shift, 117.

[68] How do they differ? (2003); Evolution (2005). "The focus of functional equivalence in FOLTA [i.e. 1986f] is on equivalence of meaning, rather than equivalence of audience response" (How do they differ, 110). – Cf. Mojola/Wendland, Era of Translation Studies, 9.

[69] How do they differ?, 103–106; Evolution, 41f.

[70] How do they differ?, 104f.

even considering there to be a quantum leap, and calls[71] for an end to the synonymous use of dynamic and functional equivalence.[72]

For our overview of Nida's work and as evidence of the continuity of his translation theory it should be noted on the one hand that the authors of 1986f did not see their work as a departure from 1969tp, but rather as a complement to it: "Basically, dynamic equivalence has been described in terms of functional equivalence."[73] Since the adjective "dynamic" had been incorrectly thought to describe any effective and engaging translation, it needed to be replaced by "functional."[74] In this way, Nida and de Waard sought to avoid being mistakenly thought to use the terms arbitrarily. They introduce the concepts of communicating rhetorical functions[75] and different levels of meaning[76] without departing from their three-step model[77] (which is set out again in the appendix[78]). The term "dynamic equivalence" is used to denote the parallel impact of a message and a repeated process of communication. The adjective "functional" – the semiotic addition to the prevailing terminology[79] of 1969 – is therefore not used to indicate a new theory. It rather indicates the *rhetorical means* by which equivalent effect should be achieved: idioms and functions in the source language should be replaced with idioms and functions in the target language.

On the other hand, speaking of the "functions" of linguistic means was nothing new in 1986. As early as 1947 Nida had suggested using an "adequate functional substitute" or "closest functional equivalent" in the target language if there was no correspondence of form and cultural item in the biblical and native cultures.[80] He may not have used the term "*dynamic* equivalence" in 1947, but he wrote in 1977 that he had introduced the principle of Dynamic Equivalence and the "closest natural equivalence" 30 years before.[81] Nida himself thus viewed its origins in light of later writings.[82]

Later publications confirm that Nida had not abandoned the concept of equivalent reaction. This was not only true until 1977;[83] in 1984 he wrote: "In order to obtain a fully satisfactory analysis of the

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[71] Ibid., 109.

[72] Ibid., 111.

[73] 1986f, 36. – An example of the synonymous use of "functional or dynamic equivalence": 1976tc, 72 (see also Statham, Evolution, 31f.). Nida later expresses the cohesion of the concepts even more strongly: "Despite the relatively wide acceptance of the principle of dynamic equivalence, there are a number of reasons to describe precisely the same principles in terms of 'functional equivalence'" (1995d, 225).

[74] Cf. Doty, Paradigm Shift, 116f.: "However, the author of this thesis does not believe that such a difference represents a significant change in Nida's approach, but rather a continued refinement of the method used in one of the steps in the translation process, namely determining the meaning to be translated." – Ma, Theory, 37: "His new book published in 1986 only amplified his previous ideas. In this work, the expression of 'dynamic equivalence' was replaced with 'functional equivalence' without any substantial change of its essential nature …"

[75] 1986, Ch. 5–6.

[76] 1986, Ch. 7–8.

[77] 1964t, 68f.; 1969tpd, 32; 1981wü, 125.

[78] 1986f, 194ff. with reference to 1969tp.

[79] Statham, How do they differ?, 107f.

[80] 1947b, 60, 132. – In *Message and Mission* "functional equivalence" is even described as an equivalence of effect (1990m, 68f.). In 1964t "dynamic" is used in addition to "functional equivalence" to describe the method used (1964t, 171). – In the interview, Nida answered the question "How have your ideas on translation changed over the years?" by simply recalling the direction he had taken back in his student days: "When I was working on my doctorate I studied linguistics, communications, and lexicography, and at the same time I took courses in anthropology, because words only have meanings in terms of the culture of which they are a part. Language is a part of culture. Therefore, we have to understand the cultures of the New Testament period if we're going to understand what the writers were trying to say."

[81] 1977n, 99.

[82] Terminology is similarly intertwined with *functional equivalence* and *sociosemiotic approach to translation*: "A sociosemiotic approach to translation clearly focuses upon the issue of functional equivalence and in doing so it must deal realistically with the concept of isomorphs …" (1985t, 122).

[83] 1977g, 104 et passim.

adequacy of a text, it is important to test the reaction of monolinguals who read or hear the text."[84] The revised edition of *Message and Mission* (1990) uses "dynamic" and "functional" equivalence interchangeably.[85] In a 1992 lexicon article, Nida emphasizes the growing importance of effective communication for Bible translation, but states that its effectiveness can only be ascertained and affirmed by the receptors' response.[86] In 1995 he again justifies the shift in terminology as a means of preventing misunderstanding, but maintains that there is "an important scientific basis for the concept of dynamic equivalence."[87] Nida thereby shows that he was still working along the same lines as 1969tp a quarter of a century later – as he was also generally understood to be.[88] The fact that Nida continued to uphold the principle of dynamic equivalence is not only proved by individual quotations, but ultimately by his fundamental understanding of translation as a communicative process.

"Toward a science of translating": transformational-generative grammar as a basis for dynamic equivalence[89]

In short, in 1964 (Toward a Science) Nida adapted Chomsky's GTG as a basis for his new translation theory, and in 1969 (Theory and Practice) he concretised the procedure for Bible translation.
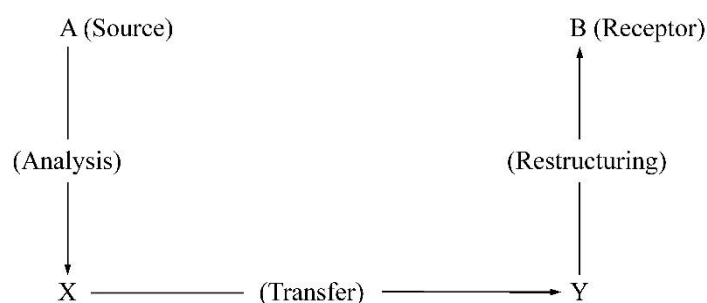
A (Source)   B (Receptor)

(Analysis)   (Restructuring)

X —— (Transfer) ——→ Y

Fig. 2. Nida's three-step model[90]

"In effect, the remainder of this book is an exposition of Figure 6, of the justification for it, and of the methods and procedures by which it may be implemented." (1969tpe, 34)

The translation process introduced in 1964 is methodologically concretized in *The Theory and Practice of Translation* (1969tpe). It should be noted that Nida's three-step model of the translation process directly assumes the theory of deep structures. In the process of analysis, the complex surface structures are be traced back to kernel sentences, i.e. the expressions are transformed so that "events are expressed as verbs, objects as nouns, abstracts (quantities and qualities) as adjectives or adverbs. The only other terms are relational terms … These restructured expressions are basically what many linguists call 'kernels'; that is to say, they are the basic structural elements out of which the language

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[84] 1984ss, 135.

[85] 1990m, 140–155, cf. Nichols, Critical Analysis, 3.

[86] 1992t, 514: "Concern for effective communication has forced translators to focus more on the response of receptors and to recognize that correctness of rendering can only be judged in terms of the way in which the intended audience is likely to understand a text".

[87] 1995d, 224.

[88] E.g. Metzger, Theories of the Translation Process, 147; Qian Hu, Implausibility I–III; J.I. Packer in the preface to Grudem et al., Translating Truth, 11; on the above quote by Doty see Ma, Exploring the Differences, 105f.: "But essentially there is not much difference between the two concepts." See also Carson, New Bible Translations, 40f. (but cf. 46) and (as recently as 2009) Longenecker, Quo vadis?, 343.

[89] On this, see my 2012 article.

[90] 1969tpe, 33; 1969tpd, 32.

builds its elaborate surface structures. In fact, one of the most important insights coming from 'transformational grammar' is the fact that in all languages there are half a dozen to a dozen basic structures out of which all the more elaborate formations are constructed by means of so-called 'transformations.' In contrast, back-transformation, then, is the analytic process of reducing the surface structure to its underlying kernel expressions. From the standpoint of the translator, however, what is even more important than the existence of kernels in all languages is the fact that languages agree far more on the level of the kernels than on the level of the more elaborate structures. This means that if one can reduce grammatical structures to the kernel level, they can be transferred more readily and with a minimum of distortion. This is one justification for the claim that the three-stage process of translation is preferable."[91]
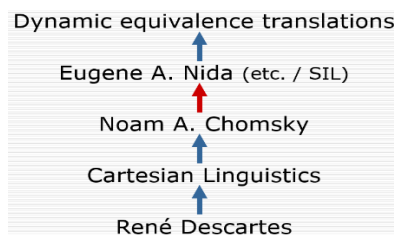

Fig 3. Philsophical roots

Nida's theory of translation (or more precisely: the vertical steps in his diagram) relies on the deep structure grammar of the authoritative model of the time (Chomsky's *Aspects of Syntax*). Nida states that the way in which his three-step model unfolds is more reflective of the actual structure of language (singular!) than is a philological, surface structure-oriented model – and posits this three-step model as the essence of his book.[92]

Here's one major problem: I didn't find places where Nida did exemplify stage 1 of his translation model in the Greek or Hebrew. Instead, he works from a literal translation such as the KJV. Here are his examples (copied from 1969tpe, 36–37 [footnotes do not apply here]):

Biblical Phrase	Unambiguously Marked Relationships
1. the will of God	God wills
2. the foundation/creation of the world	(God) creates the world
3. the God of peace	God causes/produces peace
4. the Holy Spirit of promise	God promised the Holy Spirit
5. the word of truth	the word is true
6. the riches of his grace	he shows grace richly/abundantly [2]
7. Jesus of Nazareth	Jesus came from Nazareth
8. the lake of Gennesaret	the lake is in Gennesaret
9. the land of Judea	the land is Judea
10. the Lord of the sabbath	one who commands the Sabbath [3]
11. the day of the preparation	the day when (people) prepare (for the Sabbath) [4]
12. servant of all	he serves all (people) [5]
13. the book of Moses	Moses wrote the book [6]
14. baptism of repentance	(people) repent and are baptized [7]
15. remission of sins	(God) forgives (the people) sin [8]

Fig 4. Nida's translation model

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[91] 1969tpe, 39f.
[92] 1969tpd, 31f.; 1969tpe, 33f.

And this is also what took place in so many cultures and countries without literary tradition or without portion of the Bible in the vernacular. Translators worked from some model translations, maybe Good News Bible or from KJV. In the SIL teams of Ernst Wendland (Zambia) and Sebastian Floor (Mozambique) there was nobody who translated from the Hebrew and the Greek.[93]

Although Nida has taught hundreds of translators around the world (90 countries), where one was working with the original languages, he himself never provided a translation for publication, and he did not stress to translate from the original. Rather, in many places new translations where made from new model translations like Good News Bible or TEV. To do justice to Nida, it must also be said, that he provided masses of material, including a number of *Translator's Handbooks*, in order to assist translators to bridge the gap from the biblical text to their language.

4. Theological shortcomings of Nida's theory of dynamic equivalence

Nida's shifts from traditional translating, in short:

- A shift of the dominating realm:
  from philology to communication theory, to information theory and a certain (methodically atheistic) linguistics, and parallel:
- A shift of power with regard to the active experts:
  Nida empowered linguists and dethronement biblical scholars, who were largely discharged.
- A shift of goals:
  Nida paved (maybe unwittingly) the way to the new priorities of clarity over conciseness, and eventually to acceptance over accuracy.

1. Realm of thinking and arguing about translation

Nida starts with a certain view of communication, defined by nowadays experience and science. His writings mostly begin with reflections on communication and practical everyday experiences, but not with a Biblical reflection on what word, language and communication essentially is and should work. (This probably also applies, as far as I saw, to Gutt's theory of relevance.)

The word of God within the ideology of dynamic or functional equivalence is diminished to a passive carrier of information; it is no more a living, powerful word, rather, it is some kind of malleable material, it must be "made life" by human activity. For now, humans with their autonomy must care that the word be brought to life, be understood and accepted. This results in renderings where God's activity is replaced by man's (Ps 119:37, Joh 6:29 and other).

Rather, the Word of God is a living, active word. It is the active seed of faith or stubbornness (e.g. Joh 9:39), active sword, active spirit, active life, and also destructive fire and hammer, living and life-giving water. It is honorable and holy, majestic and eternal without end.

The ideology of DE must deal with God's word the way it does, because it re-locates the asserted meaning into the communicative interactions of text and context (therefore, it fits well into a historical-critical mindset). Reaction of addressees receive equal or even more importance as the word itself. In order to prove this, we look at Nida's diagram of the old and the new task of a translation critic (the colors are mine).

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[93] It was the job of translation consultants to check vernacular translation drafts in relation to the original languages. Bridge material was also provided in the UBS Translator's Handbook series of commentaries that aimed to educate translators (or at least team leaders) about the formal and semantic intricacies of the biblical text. SIL also provided similar material on several different educational levels.
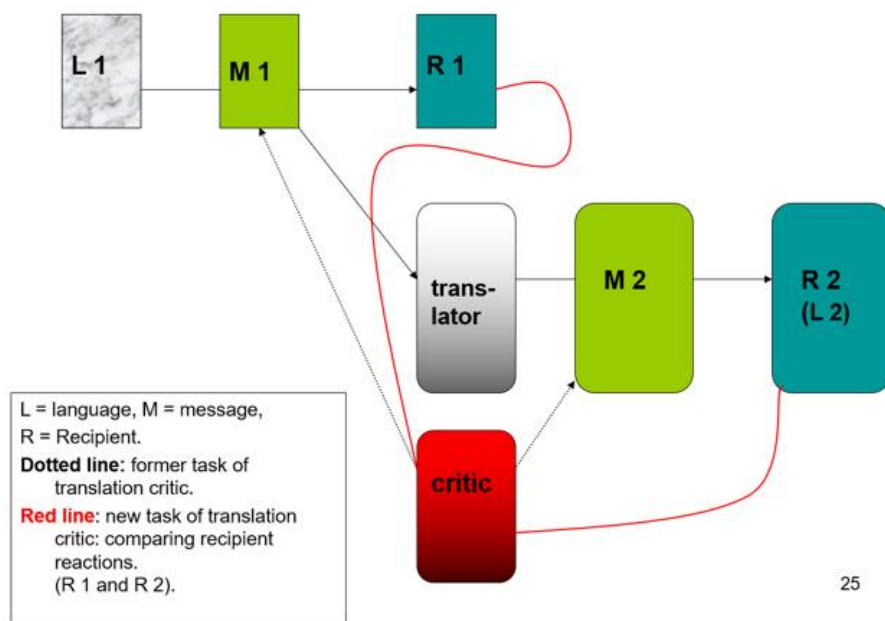
Fig. 5. The old and new task of a translation critic.

2. Lack of exegesis

a) Nida does not show the asserted kernels in the Hebrew and Greek, not even in his translator's handbooks.

b) Nida's favourite translation example does not prove his results.

A philologically diligent translation is more competent to retain intertextual references and maintains its openness to various dimensions of meaning much more than dynamic equivalent translations do. (Many participants in the debate have recognized this, but often publishers do not.)

3. Focus

There is a problematic focus of attention on the beginning and emergence of churches rather than their existence and persistence.[94] From here, addressees are determined by and large as incompetent and biblically illiterate readers and hearers, whereas Mark and other Biblical authors presuppose a great deal of biblical pre-knowledge.[95]

4. Pragmatics

"Dynamic equivalence" was and is a bold, yet unproven claim.

a) Hypothetical places in the chain of his theory: reactions of original receptors remain largely unknown, in some places even contrary to communicative objectives of prophets and apostles (unbelief of adressees).

b) Nida does not provide historical examples of reactions of original addressees and how exactly *they* are to be reproduced. Nida does not show, why reactions of today's addressees shall be determined in a certain direction (cf. 2 Cor 2:16, 10:4 and others).

c) Nida does not show, how reactions of today's addressees will be determined.

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[94] Cf. Heinrich Balz 1978.

[95] Cf. L. Ryken ch. 6 of "Word of God in English": „Eight fallacies about Bible readers"; examples from Indonesia: A. H. Nichols.

5. There is an underlying gnostic[96] tendency in the disconnection / separation of body and soul, here: word and matter in the theory of DE

To quote Bratcher:

> "We are not bound by the letter of Scripture, but by the spirit. Even words spoken by Jesus in Aramaic in the thirties of the first century and preserved in writing in Greek, 35 or 50 years later, do not necessarily wield compelling authority over us today."[97]

One undertakes (consciously or not) to reproduce the incarnation via translation (Nida, Message and Mission). This is analogous to seeking the essence instead of the word. Mephistopheles, the satanic figure in Goethe's Faust, asks: "Why do you ask for the name? You are the one eager for the essence!"

In a biblical-reformational mindset we are to look for the essence within the literal wording, not beyond. To coin it with Luther: We are to seek God and the Godhead in the humanness of Christ, we are not to run here and there to all kinds of creature, but where the word (of God) is, there you have to search, feel, and listen (Wartburg Postille 1522: "Wir sollen die Gottheit in der Menschheit Christi suchen, nicht hin- und herlaufen zu allen Geschöpfen; sondern wo das Wort ist, da tappe nach").

By contrast, it is in the words themselves where we find spirit and life (Joh 6:63, Heb 4:12).

6. Consequences after Nida

In sum, at best, DE tried to improve the communication of translations, at worst, it became a door-opener for the insertion of modern ideas into the communication/translation. This was the logic result of the "liberation [!] of the translator from the philological presuppositions of the preceding generation" (!).[98] Holy Scripture is about *revelation of truth in words*; DE is about to *perform a relationship with or without words*, but is unable to demarcate this from malformations.[99] Or as in the words of Romano Guardini on religious language:

> "If rationality tries to make its content unambiguous to worldly logic, the essence is dissolved, and what remains is, despite the highest effort of science, fundamentally banal. Hence the impression given by all rationalism when speaking of the religious: the marvel at how much material and how many methods are used to reveal something so meaningless – a meaninglessness which can be refuted by the first-hand experience of the simplest man and its expression in real words."[100]

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[96] Term applied to DE by Jason Coker, Annual Meeting SBL 2008.

[97] Cloud, Unholy hands, 43.

[98] 1964t, 21, my translation.

[99] Bruggen, Future of the Bible, 74.– Examples: further development into the even more loose translations as Volxbibel or in John Henson's "Good as new".

[100] Guardini, Religiöse Sprache, 71, ending.

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