

A Moratorium on Dynamic-Equivalent Bible Translating

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Abstract

In this personal reflection, a congruence or resemblance of critiques of modern theories of language and translation is detected. One of them arose from a thorough study of literature (Ian Robinson), the other from biblical studies (Stefan Felber). The author calls for a moratorium on new translations of the Bible into European languages.

Until being called to lecture at Saint Chrischona Theological Seminary in Basel in 2000, I had no problem with the use of dynamic-equivalent translations.¹ Afterward, I became more aware of the changes introduced in modern translations of the Bible. My motivation was by no means negative or hypercritical. The 2002 revision of *Hoffnung für alle* (on the market since 1983) bears my name as co-responsible for the Old Testament introduction (together with Prof. H. H. Klement). On being asked how the translation could be improved, I began a comparison of a series of texts—ever more dismayed—with the German *Gute Nachricht* (*Good News Bible*), and others.

¹ That is, translations which do not simply strive for submitting texts or meanings, but which claim to target for the same impact (dynamic) as the original texts in their respective settings. In the German-speaking world, *Gute Nachricht* (*Good News*) and *Hoffnung für alle* (*Hfa*, i.e., “Hope for everybody”) are dynamic-equivalent translations.

In an essay published in the journal *Theologische Beiträge*,² I concluded,

Hfa changes biblical content inappropriately, translates concretes into the abstract, reduces to psychology, takes out ontological dimensions, even at times replaces the work of God by the work of men, the transcendent by the immanent. Basic biblical terms like “righteousness,” “gospel,” “in Christ,” and “word” will no longer be recognized or even read by the reader. Given that, *Hfa* 1983 is unfit to be read in services. If used in private reading, the parallel use of faithful translations is necessary for correction.³

All the dynamic translations we compared display a loss of brevity, conciseness, and a corresponding loss of wit and flavor. Much subjective and tendentious explanation has been integrated, and through the replacement of a sacred writing style by a fluid journalistic style, the language-shaping power of Luther has been abandoned. Whatever we say in favor of modern translations of the Bible—e.g., bringing people to read it the first time—is thwarted by their reinterpretations and disease-causing legalism. Who can measure the detriment and disservice done by these “translations” to Bible readers and congregations?⁴

Introduction

“Ye shall know them by their fruits.” The fruits of a translation theory consist of translations done properly. Who is held accountable for these translations and their faults? The following theses point to the problems of Eugene A. Nida’s theory of dynamic-equivalence (since 1986 also known as “functional equivalence”). For some ten years, I undertook the task of evaluating Nida’s theories more thoroughly than had previously been done in the German-speaking realm.⁵ I tried to grasp Nida’s theory and its decades-long development as precisely as possible, and to evaluate Nida’s strongest arguments, pointing to the background in Noam Chomsky.⁶ Favorable reviews followed,⁷ but publishers and translators of dynamic translations

² Stefan Felber, “Die Bibelübersetzung ‘Hoffnung für alle’ im kritischen Textvergleich,” *Theologische Beiträge* 35.4 (2004): 181–201; this article, along with others of my publications, is available online: <https://www.stefan-felber.ch/publikationen>.

³ *Ibid.*, 198.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵ The publication of my book *Communicative Translation of the Bible: Eugene A. Nida and the Model of Dynamic Equivalence* (Stefan Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung: Eugene A. Nida und das Modell der dynamischen Äquivalenz*, 2nd ed. [Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2016]) put a temporary end to my research. This book was decorated with the Johann-Tobias-Beck-Prize in 2014 and underwent a new, slightly revised edition in 2016.

⁶ Cf. Stefan Felber, “Chomsky’s Influence on Eugene Nida’s Theory in Translating,” in Eberhard Werner, ed., *Bibelübersetzung als Wissenschaft: Aktuelle Fragestellungen und Perspektiven: Beiträge zum Forum Bibelübersetzung aus den Jahren 2005–2011* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2012), 253–62.

⁷ Eight favorable reviews appeared listed here: see www.stefan-felber.ch/publikationen.

remained conspicuously silent: there was no answer justifying an operation so overarching as the translation of the Bible.

I. *Conflict between Literary Studies and Linguistics—An Example*

In spite of extensive research, it was only in 2016 that I was pointed to the English literary critic Ian Robinson. I had not seen his name in footnotes or bibliographies. *Who Killed the Bible? Last Words on Translating the Holy Scriptures* (2006) and *The New Grammarians' Funeral: A Critique of Noam Chomsky's Linguistics* (1975) are especially relevant for our purpose.⁸

The question *Who Killed the Bible?* is not answered directly, but Robinson points to Nida and his dynamic equivalence model. My agreement with Robinson is surprising and far reaching. Let me list some cases:

1. Nida falls short of his own claim of being communicative: it is impossible for him to fulfill this pledge, and there is an inherent contradiction between intended comprehensibility and the reactions of the recipients, even in biblical times.⁹
2. There are *many* examples of obviously wrong translations based on poor or missing exegesis, among others, Nida's favorite translation example (Mark 1:4 and its context).¹⁰
3. Modern and biblical worldviews are naïvely blurred. For example,
 - Replacing "wisdom" by "skill" (Exod 36:2 KJV/GNB) reflects our modern, technological world.¹¹
 - Replacing "blessed" by "happy" in the beatitudes (descriptive of those persecuted, suffering and dying!)¹² emphasizes a world-immanent hope of improving earthly life.¹³
 - Allegedly gender-neutral changes in the Bible create the impression of similar relations of sexes and their respective ways of being addressed as seen in our current culture and time.¹⁴

⁸ Ian Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible? Last Words on Translating the Holy Scriptures* (Herefordshire: Edgeways, 2006); and *The New Grammarians' Funeral: A Critique of Noam Chomsky's Linguistics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

⁹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 72–73.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 43ff.; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 44–59.

¹¹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 96–97. "On principle they invite a reading in the context of the average modern world. But to take the 'message' (by way of the kernel-sentence paraphrase) into the modern world without its context is to deliver a different meaning" (p. 103).

¹² *Ibid.*, 98ff.

¹³ Cf. Felber, "Die Bibelübersetzung 'Hoffnung für alle,'" 194.

¹⁴ Cf. Stefan Felber, "Vorfahren statt Väter, Geschwister statt Brüder: Zur 'geschlechtergerechten' Sprache und Bibelübersetzung, insbesondere zur Neuen Zürcher Bibel," in Harald

4. Translators in the Third World tend to neglect the Hebrew and Greek texts in favor of drawing upon the *Good News Bible* as a new *Urtext* and/or model for their translations.¹⁵
5. The hypothetical average reader or hearer is implicitly disparaged.
6. The texts' meaning has been localized in the so-called kernels, as stated in this criticism of Chomsky's generative transformation grammar: "I regret I must hold the opinion that Nida's 'theory' of kernel sentences does not explain the analysis and transfer of meaning, that there is no method by which it can be judged applicable, and that in practice it has been, as I shall go on to show, devastating in its effects on translation."¹⁶
7. The distinction between form and content is naïve, and the conception of language is greatly reduced: language is reduced to a code, contents are asserted beyond the pictorial and metaphorical, and the creative and realizing power of language is neglected.¹⁷
8. The postulating of a common speech (Nida's *consumer language*) is without academic basis, and the advancement of this kind of speech is becoming a norm for translators.¹⁸
9. Dynamic-equivalent translators have established by its use in Bible translations a "journalism" style that is low, or at the least misplaced, and they have particularly disparaged poetry and rhetoric.¹⁹

Seubert and Jacob Thiessen, eds., *Die Königsherrschaft Jahwes. Festschrift zur Emeritierung von Herbert H. Klement*, Studien zu Theologie und Bibel 13 (Basel: Lit, 2015), 175–198; cf. Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 107–113.

¹⁵ Robinson refers repeatedly to the study of an Australian Anglican Bishop: Anthony Howard Nichols, "Translating the Bible: A Critical Analysis of E. A. Nida's Theory of Dynamic Equivalence and Its Impact upon Recent Bible Translation" (PhD diss., University of Sheffield, 1996).

¹⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 53.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 126; cf. Ian Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel: A Criticism of the Church of England Alternative Service Book 1980* (Retford: Brynmill, 1987), 20; *The Survival of English: Essays in Criticism of Language* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 46, 56, 58ff.; "The N.E.B. is a diminution of our whole language" (*ibid.*, 60).

¹⁸ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 105ff., 128; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 274, 335ff.

¹⁹ Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 34: "The word for N.E.B.'s style is journalism. ... And that does seem to me disastrous, not because there is anything wrong with journalism in its place, but because its place could not be in the Bible and in public reading in the church." Cf. *ibid.*, 36—however a bit exaggerated—on Revelation 21:5–6, and p. 37: "It is the casualness of style that destroys them as miracles: one can get no sense of the miraculous. ... The new versions make nonsense of the miracles by placing the centre of truth outside religion. If the only possible world is our world of newspapers and commonsense, then the miracles are not merely impossible; they are mischievous impostures" (p. 37). For the critique of a journalistic style, cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 309ff.

10. The level-lowering and resecularization of the whole of language is having an impact even on non-Christians and nonreaders of the Bible.²⁰

Had I had known of Robinson's books earlier, my book would have been sharper and more precise.

1. Robinson's contribution questions the adequacy of modern translations with respect to the target languages. "If the style fails the sense fails."²¹ Drawing on literature, Robinson adds many examples to the cultural consequences, which I had considered under "the costs of the accommodation to contemporary language."²²
2. In the first place, I questioned the justification of the theory of dynamic equivalence on the ground of text comparisons. But with equal emphasis its *scientific status* is to be questioned. Simply put: Nida's theory being scientific was based on Chomsky's theory being scientific. With the latter, the former fails as well.
3. It is doubtful whether a scientific theory of translation is possible at all. Thus, Robinson's critique reaches even the "essentially literal camp." In the *English Standard Version*, translators or revisers fail to render parataxis by parataxis (e.g., Luke 5:1–2 esv),²³ thus eliminating the narrative flow and elevating subordinate clauses to main clauses. "It is a reliable technique for dullness. Try and find a line of Shakespeare that would satisfy Ryken's criterion of rhythmic excellence!"²⁴
4. What I (in my preface²⁵) called a paradox—i.e., the coincidence of unbounded availability and ever-growing ignorance of the Scriptures—is no such thing for Robinson. Rather, the "effect—assisted by other causes—has in fact been an extinguishing of the Bible in common consciousness."²⁶ "Religious language (always in danger of going vapid) is one of the guarantees of the whole, but suffers with the whole unless it redeems it."²⁷ He is right—more later.

²⁰ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 114–18, 128f.; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 267, 303, 315, 349.

²¹ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 41.

²² Cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 354–68.

²³ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 119ff.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁵ Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 11.

²⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 127.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 129. Cf. Barbara Hallensleben and Guido Vergauwen, "Gottes Wort im Menschenwort: Eine kleine Soteriologie der Sprache," in Stefan Felber, ed., *Erkennen und Lieben in der*

Robinson acquired the linguistic, literary, and philosophic foundations for his critique during decades of lecturing in English literature. As early as in his 1975 work *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, he offered an extensive critique of the linguistic theories of Chomsky and his school. I point to this "funeral" only in passing. The title, I think, is an objective genitive: using different perspectives, Robinson rather confidently demonstrates that Chomsky's theory cannot claim scientific status.²⁸ The different paths of the two scholars led them to opposite viewpoints: Chomsky's visual field is filled with grammar, syntactic structures, and analyses of mostly simple sentences that would be judged as right or wrong by the alleged average speaker of English. Robinson, by contrast, has a comprehensive knowledge of English literature at his disposal. Moreover, that Chomsky is not willing to consider literature at its highest level is one of Robinson's charges. One can feel Robinson's pain resonating between the brackets:

Judgement in literature is the only guarantee I can think of judgement in general about language. (Chomsky has never to my knowledge betrayed the slightest interest in imaginative literature.) As said somewhere else, "If English had no great literature it would not be the language we know, even with the same grammar and vocabulary." ... It is neither an accident nor a mistake that for nineteen twentieths of its history the study of language has been firmly subordinated to the reading of classical texts. The oddity is the modern divorce, the study of language disconnected from a centre in the consideration of classical literature.²⁹

And in his critique of the *New English Bible*, which motivated him to write *The Survival of English*, he writes, "We have lost all sense of what is well and badly written, all standards of literacy. And that is not a merely stylistic matter; I shall show that it directly affects every reader of the Bible."³⁰

Chomsky's school insisted that literary critics should dig deeper into linguistics. So far, this requirement has taken one direction.³¹ Then, in Robinson, somebody stood up who hoped to receive help from linguists but was deeply disappointed. He delved into a mountain of books³² but was rejected by linguists,³³ who expected (as he says) to receive acclamation only by people of their own kind.³⁴ A literary critic uses language quite

Gegenwart Gottes: Festschrift für Werner Neuer zum 65. Geburtstag, Studien zu Theologie und Bibel 18 (Wien: Lit, 2016), 193–205.

²⁸ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 1ff., 32–33, and passim.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

³⁰ Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 26.

³¹ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 168.

³² Even though not a linguist, he had read everything by Chomsky until mid-1974 (*ibid.*, iv).

³³ Cf. the hate-filled review of Georgia M. Green in *Language* 53.2 (1977): 406–11.

³⁴ Robinson, *The New Grammarians' Funeral*, 13.

differently from a linguist.³⁵ The latter looks upon language-immanent structures and rules: language as a texture, a woven fabric. The former looks upon language with regard to its performative quasi-metaphysical (poetic, i.e., “making”) power³⁶—the reader is placed, via language or speech, before the things mentioned in the words and does not stand still looking at the forms of letters and words.³⁷ Robinson regrets the absence of awe and wonder at language of Chomsky and his language-scientists: “Awe at language should be present in linguistics and inform it. Whatever is the discipline in the subject ought to be what leads the student up to a sense of wonder.”³⁸

Robinson urges linguists to scrutinize language according to its meanings, dialects, and pitches in its everyday use and developments. These realities all too often evade Chomsky’s rules for complete or acceptable sentences!³⁹ The real hazards of language, as Ivor Richards says in a brief suggestive discussion, “are conspicuously not represented.”⁴⁰

Chomsky’s unredeemed pledge also consists of nonverbally explaining language,⁴¹ and ascribing generative or constitutive power to his rules.⁴² I cannot represent Robinson’s critique of Chomsky at length here. However, for the discussion of Nida’s translation theory, it is useful to have a look at Robinson’s evaluation of Chomsky’s theory of kernels, for example, the simple, active, and declarative sentences and their transformations. Why must kernels be in the active voice? It might be the case that active

³⁵ Ibid., 184: “It will seem strange to Chomsky and the surviving structuralists, that I have learned far more about language both from the philosophy of Collingwood and Wittgenstein and Rhees, and from the literary criticism of Leavis, than from the whole corpus of established linguistics” (almost the same list of names in Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel*, 20).

³⁶ Robinson, *Who Killed the Bible?*, 126.

³⁷ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 15ff.

³⁸ Ibid., vi, cf. 185. Cf. Robinson, *Prayers for the New Babel*, 18, after quoting from the 1980 Alternative Service Book and the New English Bible therein: “Creation is not expressible in English in these so casual temporal clauses. If the passage cannot evoke or make creation it cannot even report it. The result is a credibility gap. This story simply cannot be believed.” Robinson deems the New English Bible consequently “The Atheists’ Bible” (Robinson, *The Survival of English*, 40).

³⁹ For examples, cf. Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 19–20, 37ff: As to irony: “TG grammar has no way of showing (although it is implied by common parlance) that saying something ironically is less basic to language than saying something straight” (ibid., 49). As to metaphor: “TG grammar can say nothing about metaphor, an obviously central case of aspect because in metaphor we speak of something in terms expository prose uses for something else: we take one thing as another” (ibid., 51).

⁴⁰ Ibid., 44.

⁴¹ Ibid., 11, 52, 80ff., etc.

⁴² Ibid., 21: One is reminded of discussions about evolution mechanisms: If selection and mutation are recognized as factors for the length of the beaks of finches, what then do we have to say about the mere existence of finches?

sentences (according to Chomsky and thus Nida) can be generated and transformed more easily than passive ones. Perhaps it fits the parlance we are used to. However, there is, according to Robinson, no grammatical reason other than our culture-bound preference for simplicity. Why not, “for instance, take negative interrogative passives as kernels and derive declaratory actives as well as other forms from them”?

Chomsky tries to support his position by arguing that it is easier to derive the passive from the active than vice versa; in fact, it seems to me precisely as easy to transform passive into active as active into passive, and I believe this strengthens the system as pure grammar. We can merely state Chomsky’s rule the other way around to derive active from passive.⁴³

Therefore, the ambiguous “generate” should be specified: These rules are not dealing with real creation of language, but with description of a given wording.⁴⁴ Transformational grammar can be helpful for analyzing syntax but lacks rules for the application of rules. “There is no rule beyond the sense made, i.e. one’s pre-existent sense of language, for whether to apply a transformation at all.”⁴⁵

The absence of rules for the application of rules: Can one of the reasons for the diversity of new translations be found here? Moreover, Chomsky does not describe links between sentences or even paragraphs. It is a great disadvantage for engagement in language if linguists deal with sentences and literary critics, by contrast, deal with paragraphs, chapters, and books⁴⁶ and with “what utterances do in language. This includes some of what people often mean by the ‘effects’ of poetry—the workings of its images, rhythms, figures—but not our responses to them”!⁴⁷

Robinson’s critique of Chomsky, published the same year as *After Babel* by George Steiner,⁴⁸ is close to my critique of Nida. In addition to the issues listed above, I want to highlight the forcing of foreign languages into an English mold⁴⁹ and the devaluation of the idioms of biblical speech, which Robinson articulates powerfully: “It is interesting to see in others how Chomsky’s concentration on universals and/logical operations itself *distracts*

⁴³ Ibid., 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 33–34.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 33.

⁴⁶ Cf. *ibid.*, 45.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁴⁸ George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

⁴⁹ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 80; cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 99, 256, 270, 290, 381.

his attention from language”!⁵⁰ Chomsky cannot understand a view of language as a creative and performative power (and without that, nothing in real life could be considered or changed, as Steiner and Robinson would say). It is an open question to what extent Nida could have done so:

This is an extreme not usually occupied by Chomsky of the position that would make language essentially a reflection of a separately-existing reality. If I look out of the window on the grey Welsh morning and say “There’s an oasis!” Chomsky, to be consistent, would have to say that what I say is false (i.e. incorrect assertion) rather than lies, poetry, a joke, philosophy, or madness!⁵¹

It has been demonstrated extensively elsewhere that Nida’s translation theory works like a filter on the plethora of the biblical metaphors, idioms, and concepts. What comes to light is that Nida’s thinking can be traced back to Cartesian linguistics (according to Chomsky⁵²) and certain romantics in the nineteenth century. From there, the problem has progressed as follows:

1. Chomsky strived for a scientific linguistics.
2. Nida strived for a scientific theory of translation based upon Chomsky.
3. All too many new translations of the Bible resort to reductionism, as is well known.
4. Translators and publishers, who have swallowed Nida’s theory altogether with Chomsky’s mechanistic (and so atheistic) conception of language, have become deaf to challenges to dynamic-equivalent translation theory.

II. *End Dynamic-Equivalent Translating of the Bible!*

Can it be denied any longer that the coincidence of a growing number of Bible translations and growing ignorance of the Scriptures is no paradox, but a logical connection? Robinson has shown that the Bible according to Nida—that is, by the very transition from a biblically shaped religious language into a materialistic, facts-focused language—is *being made* strange. “The Bible *becomes* a very foreign book, needing copious notes and introduction

⁵⁰ Robinson, *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, 141 (emphasis mine).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 150.

⁵² Cf. Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics: A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 197–98, 205–7, 223–24, 349–50; and Heinzpeter Hempelmann, *Wortgetreu oder leserfreundlich? Grundfragen der Bibelübersetzung* (Wuppertal: Brockhaus, 2005), esp. 47–56.

about such matters as the Spiritual Value of the Psalms.”⁵³

However, even after such a cutting critique as *The New Grammarians’ Funeral*, the condemned live on. Studies like those of Robinson, myself, and others⁵⁴ are unheard calls to stop dynamic equivalent translating of the Bible, at least into the European languages. We should reflect more on the legacy of Martin Luther and of the King James Version.⁵⁵ *As for the European languages, I would call for a moratorium on new translations!*

Obviously, no authority or church leader can issue such a decree to translators and Bible societies. But the church as a whole is, in my view, in desperate need of reaching an agreement as to whether the path of the pluralization and individualization of the Holy Scriptures should be followed. To narrow a Bible translation down in order to target certain audiences has raised such grave problems that we have to regain a new perspective on the manner and place of Bible translation in church and society. How long can that wait? The damage already done is enormous. What has been gained? Books with large numbers of copies. The winners? Some publishers. But we are not to do big business with the Word of God (2 Cor 2:17). The church, in turn, is about to lose its center. Not only the church is losing, but also, as Robinson has shown, our language as a whole, and thus the whole society.

Even outside the realm of Bible readers, in the range of secular writing and translating, scholars are calling for reconsideration. Werner Creutziger, a prize-honored translator of French, Serbo-Croatian, and Russian literature, has published a haunting series of essays. Here, he pointed to the dangers of a downward-spiral accommodation:

If we are good translators, we know something about the inventory of linguistic devices of our readers, their passive vocabulary, their passive knowledge of grammar—thus their reception competencies. The deception is mostly found in what we term “today’s language.” Those who cry out often and loud for “Today’s German” often mean something not far from commercial language. And from here, it is only a small step to the writing of mass media. The philosophy of viewing figures and the level of speaking weigh each other down. The main feature of the so-called “today’s language” is a reduction to a few main patterns. Whoever cries out loudly and primitively will certainly be heard by many, but he makes his receptors primitive and deaf. Soon, he will have to cry out even louder, even more primitively. Such modernity leads to a diminishing of the inventory of reception devices; it desensitizes and renders immature [*unmündig*]. Such pop-translating has its place in the theater and will link with some scenic procedures committed to the same spirit: drawing

⁵³ Robinson, *Survival of English*, 46 (emphasis mine).

⁵⁴ Cf. the bibliography in Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 403–61.

⁵⁵ See, e.g., David Norton, *The King James Bible: A Short History from Tyndale to Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); and for Luther, see Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 369–80.

attention to oneself without respect to further ramifications. It is always the same gag in endless variations: the gag of anachronism. Pop-translating gains its blinding impact from the antagonism between linguistic signals, glaringly pointing to the present, and an action, which will be considered, despite all, as a past one. By consequence, one of the worst mistakes my system of values knows happens: The matter—the piece of literature—is no longer at one with itself; it is destroyed esthetically.⁵⁶

That sounds like a critique against Nida (commercial language, in Nida “consumer language”), and an echo of Robinson. No wonder: we are dealing with problems far beyond the realm of the churches. Without mentioning Nida, Creutziger, a translator of literature, considers it absurd to write as if the translated author had been writing in German. The judgment applies to the claim that a translation would fulfill the same function as the original.⁵⁷ Whereas for Nida, the theorist, the highest goal is to reach the status of a new original, for Creutziger, the practitioner, this goal is devastating, because a translation can be well written, but if it does not—in the micro realm of communication—point elsewhere (besides the content), something crucial is missed.⁵⁸ “I think ... that the current developing German literature gives away possibilities of writing, and impoverishes possibilities of reception, if it embarks too keenly into the alleged linguistic ability or inability of readers.”⁵⁹

Creutziger’s judgment that a piece of literature would be “destroyed esthetically” reminds us of Robinson. What does this mean? Will even the matter of literature be destroyed by wrong esthetics, or would only esthetics be destroyed in the remaining material value and content of a translation? With Robinson, I fear the first alternative to be true. A parallel can also be found in consequences drawn. With respect to modern techniques (nuclear power and genome research), Creutziger pleads for reticence toward a “science” whose structure and goal is moving more and more from knowing to making.⁶⁰

I believe that the dangers of making are much greater than the dangers and disadvantages created by forgoing. I believe (would that be scientific optimism?) that with a great effort of research spirit—which would be necessary—the disadvantages of a forgoing can be minimized.⁶¹

⁵⁶ Werner Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache: Essays*, Ost-West-Express 10 (Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2011), 109–10.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 115–16. Creutziger pleads for new translations of important world literature if those extant are badly done, that is, erroneous. If old translations are bad, the reason is to be found mostly in them being made according to standards of modernity in their time (116).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 119ff.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

Such a forgoing, it seems to me, is advisable also for any new translations of the Bible in European languages, at least for those done by pupils of the Nida school. The effort to determine the dynamics of a Bible translation⁶² is a making (*Machenschaft*) and a functionalism in the realm of translation, even a rendering immature (*Unmündigstellen*) of the reader.⁶³ Only those who dare to expand the inventory of reception devices will reach an expansion. If utilization and expansion of the reception devices of the readers are not undertaken even in the translation of the most important text of Western culture, where else and why should they be undertaken at all? In my view, the efforts of publishers should be to shift to the production of great study Bibles or other helps for readers of one and the same biblical text, rather than filling the market with ever new texts that rival each other. “Quantities claim each other’s room. Qualities complement each other.”⁶⁴

To pursue an open and in-depth discussion on these intricate matters is not easy. Economic interests are great, maybe too great, and the ideologies criticized reject doubts on their activities.⁶⁵ Applying Creutziger to the case of Bible translation: The interests of publishers in ever-new Bible translations, often concealed by a simple missionary appeal, supersede a reflection on the problems caused by these quickly produced translations.⁶⁶ “Perhaps, nevertheless, the ‘Great Dialogue’ may be within reach.”⁶⁷

⁶² Cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 309, 380, 387.

⁶³ Cf. Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 108–9, 143.

⁶⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung: Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, 9th ed. (München: Kaiser, 1959), 26.

⁶⁵ Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 123.

⁶⁶ Overview of the market: cf. Felber, *Kommunikative Bibelübersetzung*, 22–40.

⁶⁷ Creutziger, *Schöne neue Sprache*, 128.