The Interpretation of Romans 12:8:
ὁ μεταδίδος ἐν ἁπλότητι

Many Christians all over the world, now and in the future, owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Dr. Nida. They will not know it, because his name is not on the title page or in the colophon of the Bible translation they have in hand. But his spirit has helped and guided the minds and hands of those who labored to make the Bible available to each man in his own tongue in the present generation. By his many seminars, lectures, and books Dr. Nida has put his great learning in linguistics at the disposal of others; he has made his gifts a source of inspiration in many parts of the globe. His T(E)APOT is a classic for all those who are struggling on the long and often rough path between the original text and the expression of its meaning in the vernacular.

Dr. Nida’s name is closely associated with that method of translation called “dynamic equivalence”. Hence, it seemed appropriate to discuss in his honor a little problem by which some of the difficulties encountered by a translator may be demonstrated. Has the last word been said when we have given a dynamic equivalence translation?

Some time ago in reading a report of a conference devoted to this method of translating I came across a sentence that made me wonder. In November 1972 a meeting was held in Argenteuil, Belgium, under the guidance of some men who have good names in Bible work, viz. Dr. H.R. Weber, Rev. Kassühlke, and Rev. Fueter. The report said:

“The Principles of Dynamic Equivalence translation were studied, and their bearing on the interpretation of the Bible discussed.”

The latter half of the sentence puzzled me. My troubles may result from the brevity of this report, but I am not sure of that. At any rate in my understanding dynamic equivalence translation is a method of reproducing the understanding of the Hebrew or Greek original of the Bible in another language, not by word-for-word translation, but by the expression in the idiom of the receiving language. The translation, any translation, is based on exegesis; it is “exegesis

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2 United Bible Societies, Bulletin 93 (1973), 44 (italics are mine).
in a nutshell”, as was already discovered more than a century ago.\textsuperscript{3} Our interpretation, even if we have only a translation in hand, does not depend on the principles of translation, but on the basic exegesis. Now it may be that what the report quoted wanted to say was that a dynamic equivalence translation is a much better way to bring out the basic meaning of the original text than a so-called literal translation. But that is not clearly stated. However that may be, without sound exegesis, dynamic equivalence translation would be less than “a noisy gong or a clanging bell” (I Cor. 13:1, TEV). Nevertheless, it may be that even an excellent translation made according to this principle must remain unclear, since the original text is ambiguous. In that case footnotes are indispensible. This too, however, can only be decided on the basis of the exegesis of the original text in Hebrew or Greek.

In this paper we will discuss a little problem of this sort because it offers a good specimen of the difficulties one may encounter.

The text that is offered here for translation consists of only four words, Rom. 12:8 δὲ μεταδίδοντος ἐν ἁπλότητι. At first sight it does seem rather simple and without great puzzles.

A representative though incomplete conspectus of English translations may be helpful:

A. V.: “he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity”
Rev. V.: “he that giveth, let him do it with liberality”
Weymouth: “he who gives should be liberal”
Moffatt: “the contributors must be liberal”
R. S. V.: “he who contributes, in liberality”
Barrett: “the man who practises charity, let him do it whole-heartedly”
N. E. B.: “if you give to charity, give with all your heart”
TEV: “Whoever shares what he has with others, must do it generously”

Similar lists of translations in other languages could be made\textsuperscript{4} but would be of little help in this paper. It is evident that there are two vital points in this part of the verse, namely the exact meanings of μεταδίδοντος and ἁπλότητι.

\textsuperscript{3} W.C. van Maanen, \textit{Het Nieuwe Testament sedert} 1859 (Groningen, 1886), 36, wrote about the Dutch translation of G. Vissering (2nd ed., 1859): “The extremely modest form…in which the result of profound exegetical research has been embodied…a peculiar and yet complete exegetical-critical commentary on the New Testament” (my translation).

\textsuperscript{4} As far as I can see, all suggest by their phraseology that Paul enjoins the distribution of material gifts, though the Dutch translation of the Bible Society with the word “wie mededeelt” is equivocal, for it may be “who distributes” or “who informs”.

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