

Translation Challenges

by

Michael A. Rogers

Why “Translation Challenges”?

- Increase appreciation for possessing reliable copies of the Word of God
- Increase our appreciation for the men and women who have devoted their time, talent and treasure to doing the necessary work

(The exact purposes of this conference!)

Why “Translation Challenges”? (cont.)

- Not to resolve technical issues
- To increase awareness of the need for scholarship in the churches
- To encourage those who may be called to translation work

Why “Translation Challenges”? (cont.)

“...because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God...therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every Nation....”

– 1689 Baptist Confession of faith

Why “Translation Challenges?” (Cont.)

- “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (1Ti 3:16-17).
- Translations are a great advantage in the spiritual battle of the ages

The Need for Translation

- **6,909** ...the number of languages in the world today
- **2,393** ...the number of languages without any of the Bible
- **200,000,000** ...the number of people who speak the 2,393 languages

– Wycliff Bible Translators

Many Challenges for Translators

- Religious – what influences control the translation process? Persecution?
- Political – government censorship?
- Economic – translation has always required money!
- Social – educational condition of the target audience, etc.

(We will rely on the following presentations for some discussion of these!)

Two Major Translation Challenges

- Which text to translate?
- Which philosophy of translation to follow?

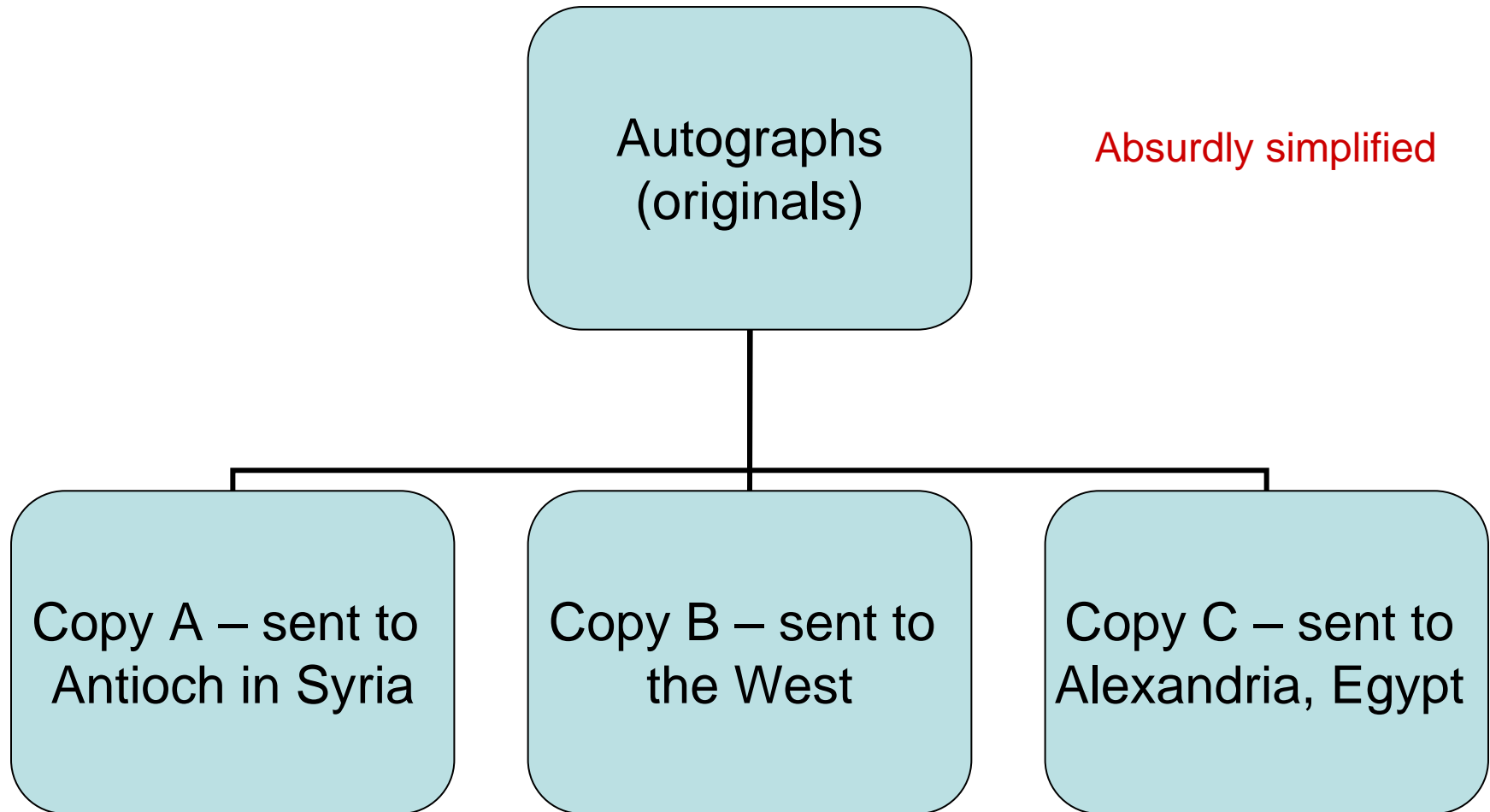
Home Base for Translation

- A “sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience”
- In writing
- The Hebrew and Greek texts
 - Immediately inspired
 - Kept pure in all ages by God
 - Authentic and authoritative

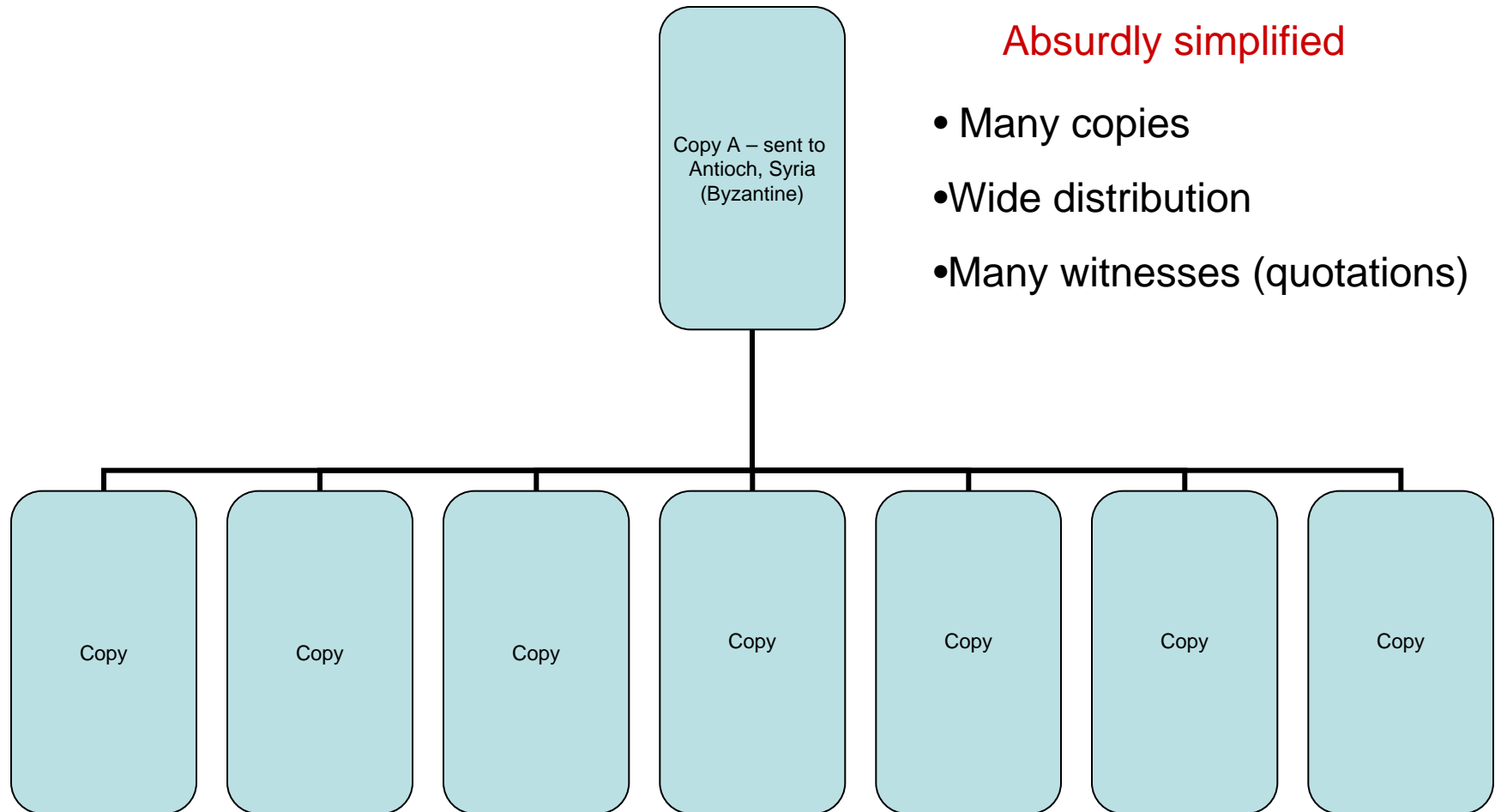
The Old Testament text

- Written (mostly) in Hebrew
- Two major (Masoretic) texts sources
 - The Ben Asher text (ca. 1008 A.D.)
 - The text edited by Ben Chayyim
- Dead Sea scrolls
 - Follow Masoretic Text with some exceptions
 - Revised views of the Septuagint (LXX)
- Summary – generally accepted, stable texts

The New Testament Text



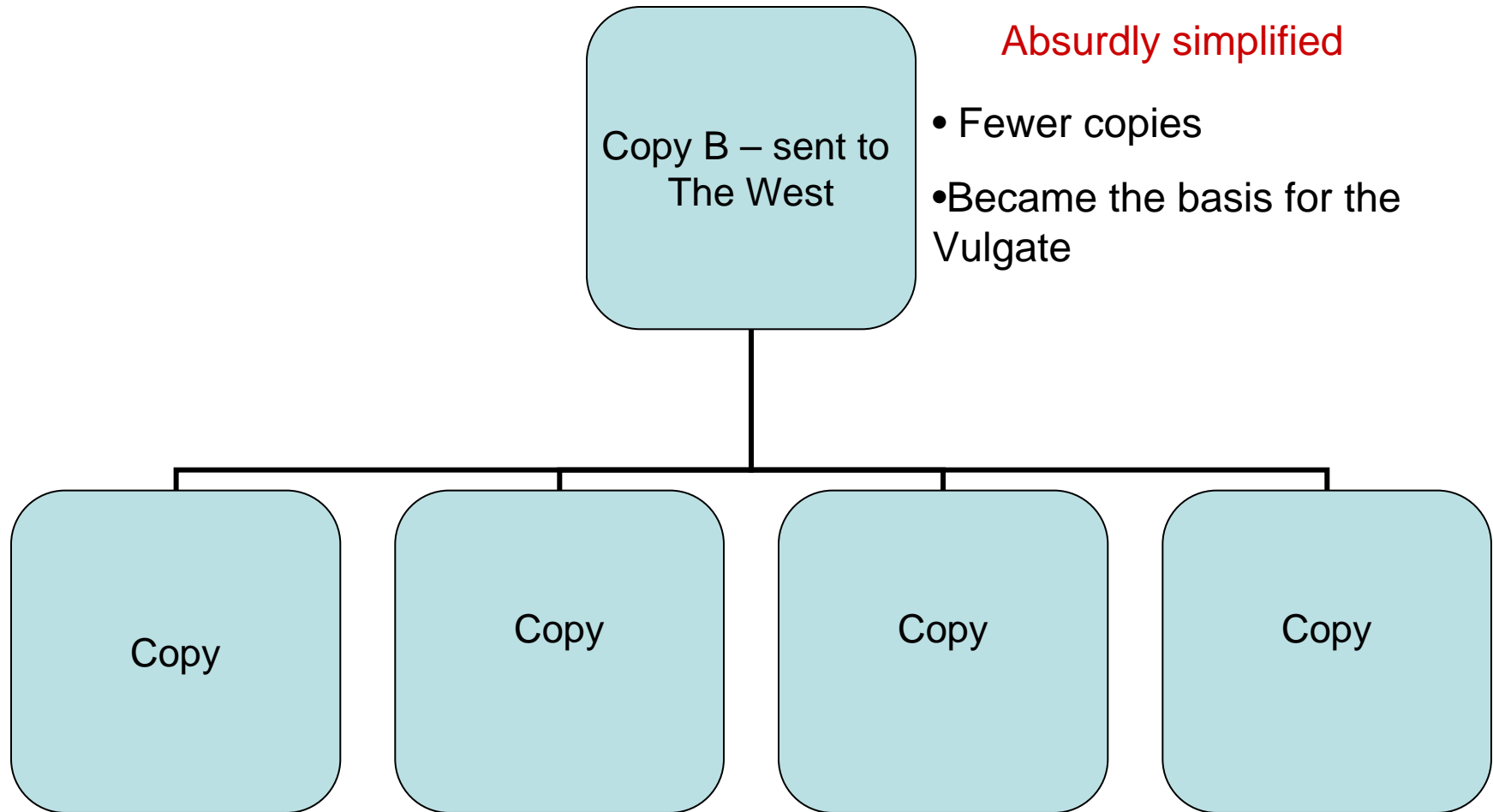
The Syrian (Byzantine) Text family



Absurdly simplified

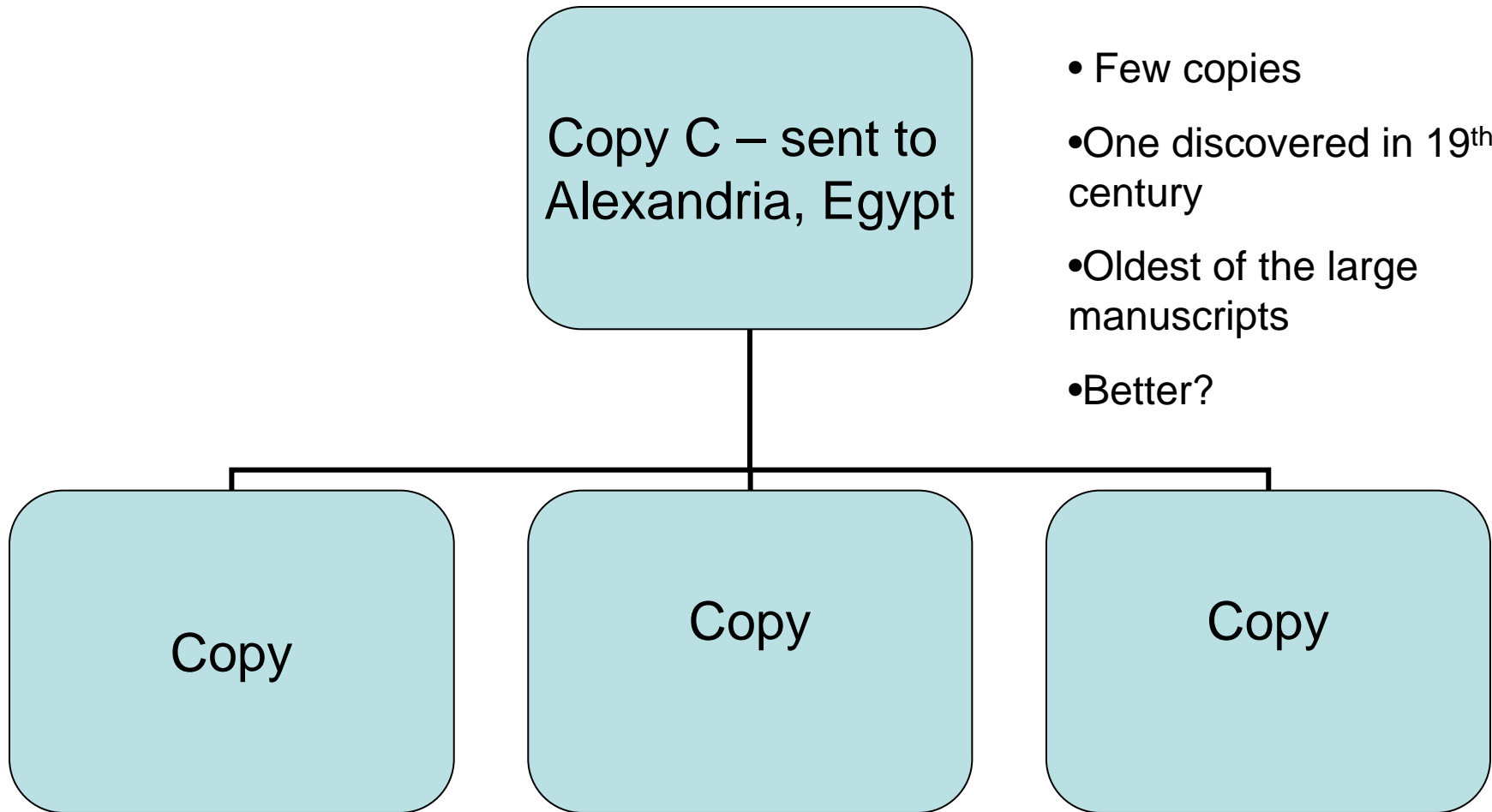
- Many copies
- Wide distribution
- Many witnesses (quotations)

The Western Text family



The Alexandrian Text family

Absurdly simplified



Greek Manuscripts

- About 5,664 New Testament Greek manuscripts
- 85 – 95% of these are from the Byzantine text family
- The oldest of these manuscripts are from the Alexandrian text family

History of Text Usage

- Roman Catholic texts – based on the Western Greek text through Jerome's Vulgate translation of early 5th century
- Wycliffe – also primarily used the Vulgate for first English version in 14th century

Two Major Events for NT Text

- Invention of the printing press (1450s)
- Creation of a Greek “critical” text by Erasmus (1516)
 - Using mostly texts from the Byzantine family
 - Work continued by Robert Estienne (Stephanus), Theodore Beza, and the Elzevir brothers
 - Became the “received text”

The Received Text: Basis for the English versions

- Tyndale (1526)
- Coverdale (1535)
- Matthew's (1537)
- Great (1539)
- Geneva (1560)
- Bishops' (1568)
- Authorized/King James (1611)

A Third Major Event – the Rise of modern textual criticism

- Carl Lachmann – applied critical methods used in editing the classics (1842-50)
- Constantine Tischendorf – discovered “Codex Sinaiticus” (1859)
- Westcott and Hort – relied heavily on “Codex Vaticanus”
- Result – the Revised Version (1885)

Textual Critics' Rules – Examples

- An older manuscript is generally to be preferred to a younger one
- A more difficult reading is to be preferred to a simpler one
- A shorter reading is generally better than a longer reading

Correct?

Critical Text Conclusions

- The modern critical text became the basis for practically all modern English versions
- The received text stood as basis for the Authorized (King James) version
- A fundamental shift in emphasis – from *recognizing* the preserved text (per the confession) to *restoring* the original autographs
- Which is best? Care is needed!

A Fourth Major Development(?)

- “...the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1Ti 3:15).
- Until the 19th century, the work of establishing the text was under the direction of churchmen
- Today, a (the?) major player is the corporate board room
- Care is needed!

Which Text? - Challenges

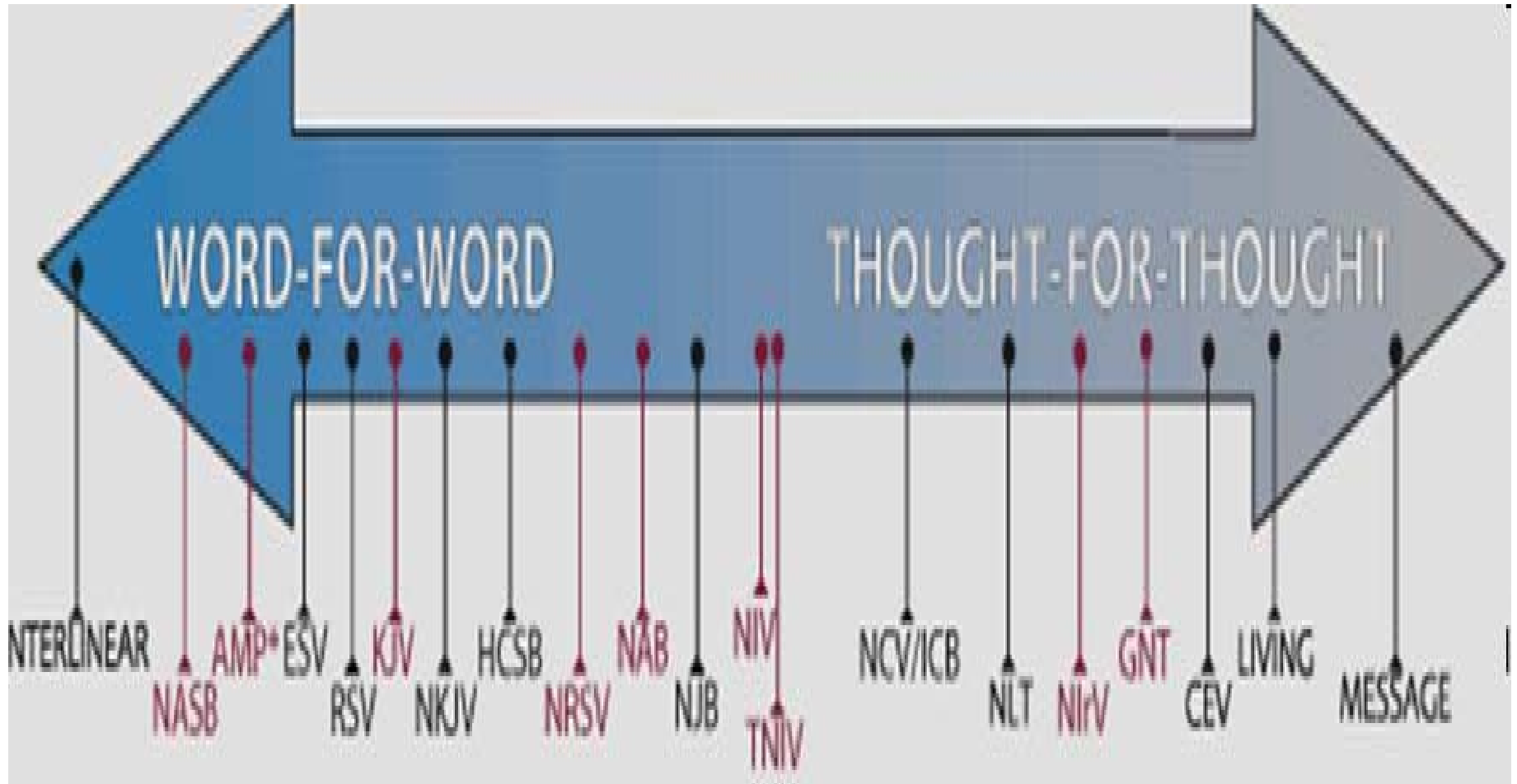
- How will the church respond to the shift from “preservation” to “restoration” of the text?
- How will the church respond to the shift of control to the Board Room?
- How will the church encourage the scholarship needed to interact (and oversee) the work of textual criticism?

Which philosophy of translation?

Bible translations usually fall into one of three types:

- **Literal** – word for word
- **Dynamic Equivalence** – thought for thought
- **Paraphrase** – much more free

Translation Philosophy Continuum



– Zondervan

Literal – Word for Word

- Pros
 - Less interpretation involved
 - Allows reader to come closer to the actual words of Scripture
 - Encourages an appreciation for the jots and tittles of Scripture
- Cons
 - Some translations can seem awkward, etc.

Dynamic Equivalence

- Pros
 - Usually easier to read
 - May clarify idioms in the source language
- Cons
 - Often supplies interpretations instead of simple translations
 - May conform to culture rather than challenging culture to elevate its thinking

Paraphrase

- Pros
 - Easy to read
- Cons
 - Danger of missing the true meaning – someone else is doing the interpretation for you
 - May encourage disrespect for the basic unit of meaning in language – the words themselves

Translation Issues – Conclusions

- The following lectures will describe the work of men who struggled mightily with these issues
- Some fundamental changes have taken place that challenge the source of authority for the Christian
- Let us celebrate the work God has done for us and dedicate ourselves to confronting these challenges

The End