In 1526 William Tyndale’s English-language *The New Testament* started showing up in England, printed in the Low Lands and smuggled into England because it was an illegal book. It represented an unapproved translation of the scriptures into the English language. In theory, a translation would have been allowed if the Church had approved it in advance. In reality, the Church was not interested in any translation of the scriptures since that would allow lay readers to interpret the scriptures on their own and to come to different conclusions regarding Church practices and doctrine. Moreover, scripture formed a fundamental role in the rise of the Protestant Reformation and, in particular, Lutheranism, which King Henry VIII had officially opposed, in the governing of his realm and in his own writings in defense of the Catholic Church (for which the Church had honored him with the title of Defender of the Faith).

Tyndale’s translation was vigorously attacked by Sir Thomas More, the King’s minister and counselor (and later chancellor), in his *Dialogue*, published in 1528. (Today this work of More’s is generally referred to as *Dialogue concerning Heresies*, but that was not its original title.) More not only attacked Tyndale for his supposed Lutheranism but also for how he had translated the Greek original into English in his 1526 New Testament. In part III, section 8 of *Dialogue*, More argues against Tyndale’s 1526 translations of *ecclesia* as ‘congregation’, *presbyteros* as ‘senior’, and *agape* as ‘love’. Near the end of this section, More also mentions his disapproval of Tyndale referring to ‘penance’ as ‘repentance’. In his later translation of the New Testament [Page 2](1534), Tyndale adopted ‘elder’ for *presbyteros*, which More had nonetheless ridiculed in his *Dialogue*, giving the argument that “elders” in the New Testament were not necessarily old. In More’s view, these “elders” were priests, even though the Latin word in the Vulgate was either the Greek loanword *presbyter* or the Latin *senior*. In all these cases, the New Testament never used the Greek or Latin word for ‘priest’ (*hieros* or *sacerdos*). And the argument over ‘penance’ later became one of whether the Greek verb for ‘repent’, *metanoeo*, should be translated as ‘repent’ or as the more Catholic ‘do penance’, from the Vulgate (paenitentiam ago).

The Protestant Reformation adopted much of Tyndale’s terminology, as in, for instance, the names of churches: the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the Congregational Church in New England. This tradition continues in the use of synonyms for congregation in church names, such as “the Assembly of God” and “the Community of Christ”. Throughout the 1500s and early 1600s, we can see a tug of war over which of all these debated terms would end up in the English Bible. By the time we get to the 1611 King James Bible (KJB), the translation issues that Thomas More viciously attacked William Tyndale over were settled as follows: (1) *love* is used throughout except in the latter part of the New Testament where *charity* is sometimes used in place of *love*, chiefly in the letters of Paul; (2) *church* is used for both the general organization and the individual congregation, with the reader determining which meaning is meant in any given passage; (3) *elder* is used for the church office, not *priest*; and (4) *repent* is used throughout, never the Catholic *do penance*.

In reviewing these decisions in the King James Bible, we can see that some deference is paid to More in the epistles with the use of *charity* rather than *love* in certain phrases (thus “faith hope charity” in 1 Corinthians 13:13), otherwise the New Testament word is *love*. Tyndale’s word, especially in the gospels where even the Vulgate has *amo* ‘love’ (thus “lovest thou me” in John 21). For sure, More wins with the word *church*. the Protestant *congregation* is avoided, although one can tell from [Page 3]context which meaning for *church* is intended. But Tyndale wins with *elder* and *repent*. (The word *priest* occurs in referring to the Jewish priests, but not as an office in the Christian church.)

In the following summary, I set out the history of these four words for certain key New Testament passages. We see for selected translations how the original Greek and the secondary Latin (the Vulgate) ended up in the English Bible in the 1500s and early 1600s. I also provide a modern translation from the 1989 Revised English Bible (REB), which has been approved by both the Catholic Church and Protestant churches for use in the British Isles. Even the Catholics have now accepted the King James translation of all these terms.

**The Debate Over the Four Words in the 1500s and 1600s**

(1) *agape* ‘love’ versus ‘charity’ (from the Latin *caritas*)
Tyndale Versus More in the Book of Mormon

in the epistles, the Rheims New Testament
and the King James Bible use *charity* as well as *love*

1 Corinthians 13:13

Tyndale NT 1526
now abideth faith hope
and *love*

Tyndale NT 1534
now abideth faith hope
and *love*

Geneva Bible 1560
and now abideth faith hope
*and love*

Rheims NT 1582
and now there remain faith
hope *and charity*

KJB 1611
and now abideth faith hope
*charity*

REB 1989
there are three things that last
for ever : faith hope
and *love*

in the gospels, all use *love*, never *charity*


Tyndale NT 1526
thou shalt love thine neighbor
as thyself

Tyndale NT 1534
love thine neighbor
as thyself

Geneva Bible 1560
thou shalt love thy neighbor
as thyself

Rheims NT 1582
thou shalt love thy neighbor
as thyself

KJB 1611
thou shalt love thy neighbor
as thyself

REB 1989
love your neighbor
as yourself

(2) *ecclesia* ‘congregation’ versus ‘church’

(3) *presbyteros* ‘elder, senior’ versus ‘priest’

Acts 15:4

Tyndale NT 1526
they were received
of the *congregation* and
of the apostles
and *seniors*

Tyndale NT 1534
they were received
of the *congregation* and
of the apostles and elders

Geneva Bible 1560
they were received
of the church and
of the apostles and elders

Rheims NT 1582
they were received
by the church and
by the apostles
and *ancients*
Tyndale Versus More in the Book of Mormon

they were received
of the church and
of the apostles
and elders
they were welcomed
by the church and
the apostles and elders

Note that church is decided early on (for instance, in the 1560 Geneva Bible, a Protestant Bible).

(4) metanoeo ‘repent’ versus ‘do penance’ (from the Latin paenitentiam ago)

Mark 6:12

and they went out
and preached that
they should repent
and they went out

Tyndale NT 1526

and they went out
and preached that
they should repent
and they went out

Tyndale NT 1534

and preached that
men should amend their lives
and going forth

Geneva Bible 1560

and they preached that
men should do penance
and they went out

Rheims NT 1582

and preached that
men should repent
so they set out

KJB 1611

and proclaimed
the need for repentance

REB 1989

The Ecumenical Book of Mormon!

Interestingly, the Book of Mormon is in full agreement with the vocabulary decisions made in the King James Bible, yet it makes adjustments for the original debate by making sure that you, the reader, correctly understand how to interpret these words. Thus we find that the Book of Mormon often tells the reader that the word charity is 'love' – that is, in various places [Page 6] it adds the word love so that you won’t think that the text is referring to alms giving (Tyndale’s complaint about the Latinate word charity). When the word church is used in the Book of Mormon, the text will let you know that church can be used to mean both the organization and the individual congregation. And interestingly, the church in the Book of Mormon has both elders and priests, not just one or the other. In each case the Book of Mormon builds upon the original debate, yet resolves it according to the King James translation. Even then, the resolution follows Tyndale’s interpretation.

love and charity

that all men should have
charity which charity
is love
this love which thou hast had
for the children of men
is charity
but charity is the pure love
of Christ
and I am filled with charity
which is everlasting love
church and churches

Mosiah 25:21
they did assemble themselves together in different bodies being called churches and thus notwithstanding there being many churches

Mosiah 25:22
they were all one church yea even the church of God

elders and priests

Alma 4:7
yea and to many of the people which Alma had consecrated to be teachers and priests and elders over the church he ordained priests and elders by laying on his hands the manner which the disciples – which were called

[Page 7]Alma 6:1
the elders of the church – ordained priests and teachers the manner of their elders and priests administering the flesh and blood of Christ unto the church behold elders priests and teachers were baptized

Note that Moroni 3:1 sets the elders hierarchically over the priests and teachers.

repent, but no “do penance” at all in the Book of Mormon

Alexander Campbell claimed in his early review of the Book of Mormon (in 1831) that Joseph Smith’s golden bible was simply commenting on the religious issues of the early 1800s in America. To the contrary, there is considerable evidence that the issues and the cultural milieu of the text date more from the late 1600s than the early 1800s, during a time when the conflicts between the low-church Protestants, high-church Anglicans, and Catholics had been basically resolved (or at least reached a kind of peaceful truce in England). References to “secret combinations” and to “standing at the bar of God to be judged” can be more reasonably traced to this period, not to the early 1800s (or to biblical usage). The translation issues that Thomas More attacked William Tyndale over were basically settled in the King James Bible (1611), yet the Book of Mormon takes those translation issues to their final conclusion by explicitly resolving the conflict by (1) frequently declaring charity to be love, as in the “pure love of Christ”, (2) allowing for both elders and priests as offices in the church, and (3) explicitly stating that the word church refers to both congregation and God’s organization. The Book of Mormon resolves the controversy in favor of the King James solution but from the point of view of William Tyndale.