THE HISTORY OF THE NIV TRANSLATION CONTROVERSY

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I. Introduction

A. In this workshop I propose to explain the history of the controversy that has surrounded the *New International Version* (NIV) from its inception in the 1970s until its current 2011 edition (NIV11). I think it is appropriate (essential?) to figure out how we got where we are before we figure out what to do about it. I will trace the translation history of the NIV, including the various controversies that have popped up from time to time. More than some versions, the NIV has faced a good deal of criticism from its inception, but, admittedly, the recent controversy about gender-inclusive language has only intensified the censures. As I said, my workshop here today will mainly focus on tracing the history of the controversy, rather than being a personal critique of the NIV11, though I do make some evaluations along the way. One reason for that is that a friend of mine (and graduate of DBTS), Dr. Rod Decker from Baptist Bible Seminary (Clarks Summit), has recently written an extensive review of the NIV11 with which I am in agreement, so there is no need for me to do what he has already done so well. It is available on his website\(^1\) and will be published in the November issue of the online journal *Themelios*.\(^2\) I urge you to read it.

B. With your indulgence, I will begin with a little personal history. I was brought up and saved at a time when the King James Version (KJV) was universally used in the circles in which I moved. When I went to Bible college, I continued to read and memorize it. During my seminary days in the 1970s, I was influenced to look favorably on the *New American Standard Bible* (NASB), both for its more updated English and superior (as I came to believe) textual base in the NT. By the late 70s, I was using it whenever possible. It was a literal, mostly word-by-word translation that represented almost perfectly the way we Greek students made our translations into English. During my doctoral work, the NASB was the preferred version. Shortly afterward, while teaching in Bible college in the fall of 1982, I happened to pick up a library copy of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* by Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart.\(^3\) I read chapter 2, “The Basic Tool—A Good Translation,” and until then I had never given much, if any, thought to what they called “The Science of Translation.” They argued for “dynamic equivalence,” which they defined as: “The attempt to translate words, idioms, and grammatical constructions of the original language into precise equivalents in the receptor language. Such a translation keeps historical distance on all historical and most

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2http://thegospelcoalition.org/publications.

factual matters, but ‘updates’ matters of language, grammar, and style.” Their argumentation was absolutely convincing to me. I purchased my first copy of the NIV and have used it in my teaching since 1983. So, I should admit at the beginning—I have a clear bias toward the NIV.

II. Translation History of the NIV

A. The impetus for the NIV is commonly traced back to the efforts of a Seattle businessman named Howard Long, who in the mid-1950s became frustrated with the archaic language of the KJV as he attempted to evangelize those with whom he came in contact. Long believed a new translation was needed, and he enlisted the help of his local Seattle pastor, Peter De Jong, and his local church, which was a member of the Christian Reformed Church (CRC), a modest-sized Dutch Reformed denomination based in Grand Rapids, Michigan. The CRC had already looked into the matter of a new translation for their denomination and in 1953 had appointed a committee to study the recently published Revised Standard Version (NT, 1946; OT, 1952) to see if it would meet the denomination’s needs.

B. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) itself was a direct descendent of the KJV. Though it is not well known, the KJV itself went through several major revisions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The last was the fourth revision prepared by Dr. Benjamin Blayney for Oxford University Press, which has become known as the Oxford standard edition. By the end of the 19th century, the archaic language problem of the KJV, as well as what was felt to be its inferior textual base in the NT, induced the Church of England along with several other British Protestant denominations to produce a revision of the KJV that became known as the Revised Version (NT, 1881; OT, 1885). Although some Americans (a committee of thirty-two headed by Philip Schaff) had some input into the translation decisions in the Revised Version (RV), they were not completely happy and created their own revision of the RV in 1901, the American Standard Version (ASV). The ASV was well received in academic circles, seminaries, and colleges, and was officially approved by several denominations and religious contexts.

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4Ibid., p. 35.


groups, but its rather awkward literalness and retention of much of the same Elizabethan English meant that it was never able to replace the KJV in most churches.

KJV 1611 → KJV 1769 → RV → ASV

C. In 1929 the International Council of Religious Education (later part of the National Council of Churches) obtained the copyright to the ASV. A Standard Bible Committee was formed to oversee any future revisions.\(^\text{10}\) The RSV NT appeared in 1946 (OT, 1952) and was the first major English translation produced after the Modernist/Fundamentalist debate and split. It was a revision of the ASV with more modern language, though still retaining the lineage of the KJV.

KJV 1611 → KJV 1769 → RV → ASV → RSV

Though it was adopted by many mainline denominations, the RSV was initially rejected by most conservatives because its translation committee almost exclusively consisted of liberals (modernists) and was viewed as having a liberal bias in the way it handled various OT messianic passages (e.g., “young woman” instead of “virgin” in Isa 7:14).\(^\text{11}\)

D. The CRC rejected the RSV for use in its churches in 1954, thinking it would never gain acceptance among evangelicals.\(^\text{12}\) The CRC had approved the ASV in 1926, but it never displaced the KJV in its churches.\(^\text{13}\) In 1956 the CRC agreed to study the matter of a new translation and in 1958 officially endorsed the concept. In 1957 the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) also began to consider the idea of a new translation and so established a Bible translation committee. The CRC and the NAE joined hands in the project at a meeting in Grand Rapids in 1961.\(^\text{14}\) But even then there was still a lingering question as to whether they should actually go forward with a completely new translation, which would be a major undertaking, not to mention the cost. Some felt the RSV might be redeemed, and consideration should be given to the Berkeley Version that been published in 1959, as well as the NASB, which was currently in production (NT completed in 1963). Both groups continued to meet over the next few years, and in August of 1965, at a meeting near Chicago (Trinity Christian College), thirty-two biblical scholars, from twenty-eight Bible institutes, colleges, and seminaries, representing a variety of denominations, resolved to prepare a “contemporary English

\(^{10}\text{Peter J. Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 70–71.}\)

\(^{11}\text{Both Dallas Theological Seminary and Grace Theological Seminary came out in opposition to the RSV in 1953. See C. F. Linclon, ed., “A Critique of the Revised Standard Version,” Bibliotheca Sacra 110 (January 1953): 50–66. I also have in my possession a copy of a booklet produced by the faculty of Grace Theological Seminary, published in 1953, opposing the RSV. See also the lengthy discussion in Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, pp. 87ff.}\)


\(^{13}\text{See http://www.crcna.org/pages/beliefs_bibletranslations.cfm (accessed 4 October 2011).}\)

translation of the Bible...as a collegiate endeavor of evangelical scholars.”¹⁵ A continuing committee of fifteen was chosen to supervise the translation. This independent, self-governing group became known as the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), with its own constitution (finalized and adopted by the committee on July 11, 1967).¹⁶ The CRC officially pulled out of the project in 1966, but a number of leading CRC scholars continued to independently participate in the project.¹⁷

E. The original CBT members (from 1965 to 1983):¹⁸

1. E. Leslie Carlson, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
   Carlson (death) was replaced in 1968 by Larry Walker (Southwestern Baptist Seminary)¹⁹
2. Edmund P. Clowney, Westminster Theological Seminary
   Clowney (resigned) was replaced in 1968 by Robert D. Preus (Concordia Theological Seminary)²⁰
3. Ralph Earle, Nazarene Theological Seminary
4. Burton L. Goddard, Gordon Divinity School
5. R. Laird Harris, Covenant Theological Seminary
6. Earl S. Kalland, Conservative Baptist Theological Seminary (Denver)
7. Kenneth S. Kantzer, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School
   Kantzer (resigned) was replaced in 1969 by Richard N. Longenecker (Trinity Evangelical Divinity School)²¹
8. Robert Mounce,²² Bethel College (St. Paul)
   Mounce (resigned) was replaced in 1967 by Youngve R. Kindberg (New York Bible Society)²³
   Kindberg (resigned) was replaced in 1983 by Donald J. Wiseman (University of London)²⁴
9. Stephen W. Paine, Houghton College
10. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Central Michigan University
    Pfeiffer (inactive) was replaced in 1974 by Kenneth L. Barker (Dallas Theological

¹⁷Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, p. 133.
¹⁹Ibid., p. 252.
²⁰Ibid. p. 251
²¹Ibid., p. 252.
²²Interestingly, Robert Mounce also later served on the Translation Oversight Committee for the ESV (now emeritus). His son William Mounce also served on that same committee for the ESV translation (now emeritus). William Mounce joined the CBT in 2009.
²⁴Ibid., p. 261.
Seminary)\textsuperscript{25}

11. Charles C. Ryrie, Dallas Theological Seminary
   Ryrie (resigned) was replaced in 1979 by Ronald F. Youngblood (Bethel Seminary, San Diego)\textsuperscript{26}

12. Francis R. Steele, North Africa Mission
   Steele (resigned) was replaced in 1971 by William J. Martin (Regent College)\textsuperscript{27}
   Martin (died) was replaced in 1980 by Bruce K. Waltke (Regent College)\textsuperscript{28}

13. John H. Stek, Calvin Theological Seminary
14. John C. Wenger, Goshen Biblical Seminary
15. Marten H. Woudstra, Calvin Theological Seminary

F. The CBT chose teams of scholars (over 100\textsuperscript{29}) to do the actual translation work and required each of them to affirm a statement on the inerrancy of Scripture.\textsuperscript{30} In 1968 Edwin H. Palmer was appointed as executive secretary to oversee the day-to-day operation of the CBT.\textsuperscript{31} The estimated cost of the project was first projected at $500,000, but then upped to $850,000 (by the end of 1975 $1,266,809 had been spent).\textsuperscript{32} Financing for the project came from the New York Bible Society (NYBS), which voted to sponsor the translation in 1968, with a budget of $100,000 for the first year.\textsuperscript{33} The New York Bible Society added International (NYBSI) to its name in 1971,\textsuperscript{34} then changed its name to the International Bible Society (IBS) in 1988 (and moved to Colorado Springs), and finally, in 2009, changed its name again to Biblica. Biblica holds the copyright to the NIV.

G. In 1969 the NYBS published a paperback edition of the Gospel of John under the title *The Gospel According to John: A Contemporary Translation*. In 1971 Zondervan Publishing Company entered into an agreement with the NYBSI to be the sole American licensee for commercial trade editions.\textsuperscript{35} In the fall 1973 the NIV NT was published. Work continued on the OT, but by 1975 the costs of the project were so great that the

\textsuperscript{25}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 256.

\textsuperscript{26}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 261.

\textsuperscript{27}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 253.

\textsuperscript{28}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 261.

\textsuperscript{29}See \url{http://www.biblica.com/niv/translators} (accessed 8 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{30}``The Bible alone, and the Bible in its entirety, is the Word of God written, and is therefore inerrant in the autographs’; or the statement on Scripture in the Westminster Confession, the Belgic Confession, the New Hampshire Confession, or the creedal basis of the National Association of Evangelicals; or some other comparable statement”(Committee on Bible Translation Constitution, article 7, section 1, available at \url{http://www.niv-cbt.org/category/questions/translators-committee-on-bible-translation} [accessed 8 October 2011]).

\textsuperscript{31}Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” p. 244.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 255.

\textsuperscript{33}Barnard, *God’s Word in Our Language*, p. 89.


\textsuperscript{35}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 254.
NYBSI had to sell its own building to meet expenses. However, even that was not sufficient, and in 1976 Zondervan agreed to advance the Bible Society up to $250,000. Finally, in 1978 the complete Bible came off the press. The CBT continues to meet each year, and in 1984 a minor revision (NIV84) was published based on criticisms and proposals that had accumulated over the years since the initial publication of the NT in 1973.

III. Reception of the NIV
A. It seems fair to say, looking back, that from the beginning the NIV was well received in most evangelical and a few fundamental circles. Certainly though, even initially, there were dissenters. Stewart Custer (BJU) complained that it was “highly interpretative and very free,” a “New Evangelical” translation that “deliberately removes all the old pronouns, such as thou, thee, and thy, even from prayer addressed to God.” From a different part of the theological spectrum, a Lutheran observer, though not as severe as Custer, nevertheless concluded, “Although there are certainly worse translations on the market, there appears to be little about the NIV which encourages replacing the New American Standard Bible, the Modern Language Bible (the ‘Berkeley’ version), or even an expunged RSV with it.”

B. Despite misgivings by some pastors and academics, by 1986 the NIV had become the best selling English version of the Bible, the only one to displace the KJV in almost 500 years, and it remains so today. The October 2011 figures from the Christian Booksellers Association are as follows:
1. New International Version
2. King James Version
3. New King James Version
4. New Living Translation
5. English Standard Version
6. Holman Christian Standard Bible
7. New International Readers Version
8. Other Translations
9. Reina Valera 1960 (Spanish)
10. New American Standard Bible update

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39Well-known fundamentalist pastor Dr. Earnest Pickering was using the NIV in his pulpit at his church (Emmanuel Baptist, Toledo, OH) in the early 1980s.
These figures vary from month to month, but the NIV is consistently in first place.\footnote{I believe it was the growing popularity of modern translations at the expense of the KJV, especially the NIV, by the conservative Bible-reading public that fueled the rapid rise of the KJV-only movement in the 1970s. Although KJV-only sentiment has been around since the 1920s (see Thuesen, \textit{In Discordance with the Scriptures}, pp. 59–65), it seems to have reached critical mass when fundamentalist Christians began to lay aside the KJV for modern versions.}

C. The criticism of the NIV seems to have been infrequent early on, but as it grew in popularity, it began to attract numerous negative critiques, chiefly due to its translation philosophy, commonly called dynamic equivalence, which was a departure from the more literal philosophy that had been traditionally been followed in the line of Bibles that trace their heritage to the KJV.

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\text{KJV 1611} \rightarrow \text{KJV 1769} \rightarrow \text{RV} \rightarrow \text{ASV} \rightarrow \text{RSV}
\]

At least partly in reaction to the previously mentioned conservative rejection of the RSV, the Lockman Foundation produced another revision of the ASV, the previously mentioned \textit{New American Standard Bible} (NT, 1963; OT, 1971; updated 1995). The NASB followed the literal approach of the ASV.

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\text{KJV 1611} \rightarrow \text{KJV 1769} \rightarrow \text{RV} \rightarrow \text{ASV} \rightarrow \text{NASB}
\]

D. Although NASB had a ten-year head start, it was quickly passed by the NIV, which, by the late 1980s, was close to becoming something of a “standard” translation among large segments in the evangelical community. Kenneth L. Barker, who had become secretary of the CBT at the death of Edwin Palmer in 1980, edited a book of essays designed to demonstrate the superiority of the NIV.\footnote{\textit{NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation} (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).} But the critics became more vocal. Robert Martin (\textit{Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version}) argued that “heavy use of the dynamic equivalence philosophy is at odds with the doctrine of verbal-plenary inspiration,” and “associated with heterodox views of biblical inspiration and authority.”\footnote{(Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989), p. 69.} Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges (\textit{The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation}) also found the dynamic equivalence of the NIV to be unacceptable, associated with “a low view of inspiration.”\footnote{(Dallas: (Redención Viva, 1990), p. 12.} In an article entitled “Dynamic Equivalence and Some Theological Problems with the NIV,” J. W. Scott said that the dynamic equivalence of the NIV in the book of Acts produces significant theological problems, including obscuring the obvious teaching of paedobaptism, as well as not doing justice “to what Luke says or implies in Acts regarding the inspiration and infallibility of Scripture.”\footnote{\textit{Westminster Theological Journal} 48 (Fall 1986): 361.} Robert L. Thomas of The Master’s Seminary also weighed in against dynamic equivalence with a couple of articles.\footnote{Bible Translations: The Link between Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” \textit{Master’s Seminary Journal} 1 (Spring 1990): 53–73; “Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?” \textit{Master’s Seminary Journal} 1 (Fall 1990): 149–75;} Ken Barker, who had become...
sort of the chief spokesperson for the NIV, produced a couple of volumes designed to answer some of the critics.49

IV. Continued Controversy over Translation Philosophy
A. In the last twenty years opposition to the translation philosophy used in the NIV has never abated. Essays in popular magazines, academic journals, books, and on the web continue to reject the NIV’s “dynamic equivalence.”50 Popular preacher and author Dr. John Piper candidly remarked in 2004:

Key question: the NIV appeared in 1978. I read it. Why didn’t I use it? The reason I didn’t use it is the reason I am here tonight. The NIV is the best-selling modern translation of the Bible. There are about 150 million copies in print. The NIV makes up about 30% of all Bible sales. Among evangelicals the percentage would be far above 30% and is probably the Bible most evangelicals read most often. And the one most pastors use in preaching. Why am I not on board?

Not only am I not on board. I would be happy to see the NIV sail into the sunset if it could be replaced by the ESV as the standard preaching, reading, memorizing Bible of the English-speaking church. I feel so strongly about this that I volunteered to do this tonight before I was asked. There is no coercion here. I feel what I am about to say with a passion built up over 25 years. I have longed that there be something more readable than the NASB and more literal than the NIV. The NIV is a paraphrase with so much unnecessary rewording and so much interpretation that I could not preach from it.51

In the same address Piper explains his previous preference for the RSV:

As a freshman at Wheaton [1964] I remember the very place in the bookstore where I picked up the first Bible I ever bought for myself, a Revised Standard Version. It was close enough to the King James so that I felt at home, but its English was not Elizabethan; it was


my English. So I was doubly at home. This became my reading, meditating, memorizing Bible for the next 37 years [till the ESV was published in 2001].

B. Piper’s reference to the RSV provides an opportunity to introduce the English Bible that has become a major rival to the dominance of the NIV in evangelical circles, the English Standard Version (ESV). It may come as a surprise to learn of Piper’s preference for the previously discussed RSV, given what I have said about its general rejection in evangelical circles. But that disdain was not shared by everyone in the evangelical community. Actually, when the NT was published in 1946 it caused practically no ripples even among fundamentalists. Moody Bible Institute’s magazine Moody Monthly praised the RSV, and John R. Rice ran ads for it in The Sword of the Lord. It was only when the OT was published in 1952 with its conjectural emendations to the Hebrew text and questionable messianic translations (e.g., Isa 7:14) that serious opposition came forth. But not all evangelicals were convinced that there was a problem. I previously noted that the CRC had rejected the RSV in 1954, but it ultimately approved it in 1969, concluding after years of study and debate that the RSV was not theologically dangerous. In 1970 Donald Gray Barnhouse defended it in an article in Eternity magazine. The faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, in particular, strongly defended the RSV, including the Isaiah 7:14 translation. John Piper went to Fuller for his seminary training, so his fondness for the RSV, first kindled at Wheaton, would not have been dampened in seminary. By the 1970s the RSV was being used at a number of evangelical colleges and seminaries. The latest revision (1978–88) of the widely respected International Standard Bible Encyclopedia uses the RSV as its default translation.

C. In John Piper’s previously noted address, he continues his narrative:

But I hit a problem in 1980. I became the preaching pastor at Bethlehem Baptist Church. What version to use? The RSV was out of print—they weren't making pew Bibles any more. I needed a literal version with all the words and phrases as close to the original as possible. I could not preach from another kind of Bible, because I made my points from the very wording of the Bible, and when the wording vanished into paraphrase I could not make my points with clarity and authority. The most literal modern translation was the NASB, and that is what I chose. So I have preached from the NASB for over 20 years. But I groaned that it was never going to be the common reading, memorizing Bible of the people. It is too awkward and unnatural in the way it flows.

Piper’s fondness for the RSV, shared by others, particularly Wayne Grudem of Trinity

52Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, p. 86.


54John R. Rice eventually apologized for the Sword’s support of the RSV (ibid.).


56“I Have Read the RSV,” April 1970, p. 6.

57Thuesen, In Discordance with the Scriptures, p. 129.
Evangelical Divinity School, led to its use as the base text for the ESV. In 1998 Grudem and Lane Dennis, president of Crossway Books, obtained permission from the National Council of Churches, which owned the copyright, to use the 1971 revision of the RSV as the starting point for their new version.58 The RSV itself had already been replaced by the New Revised Standard Version in 1990. In 1999 Crossway announced the ESV would be forthcoming.

KJV 1611 → KJV 1769 → RV → ASV → RSV → ESV

The ESV (2001) was produced by a translation team of more than 100 under the direction of a twelve-member Translation Oversight Committee.59 In contrast to the NIV, the ESV claims to be an

“essentially literal” translation that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and the personal style of each Bible writer. As such, its emphasis is on “word-for-word” correspondence, at the same time taking into account differences of grammar, syntax, and idiom between current literary English and the original languages. Thus it seeks to be transparent to the original text, letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original.60

The ESV updated the archaic language of the RSV and made “significant corrections in the translation of key texts,”61 which means, for example, restoring “virgin” in Isaiah 7:14. The “essentially literal” philosophy of the ESV is understood as being an antidote to the improper translation philosophy of the NIV. As John Piper said in that same previously noted address: “My aim tonight is to help you be persuaded that exposing millions of people (pastors, teachers, students, laypeople) to the ESV would undo the dominance of the NIV.”

D. Given the continuing controversy concerning the “dynamic equivalence” translation philosophy of the NIV, a few words are in order.62 Fee and Strauss explain:

The task of translation is to transfer the meaning of words and sentences from one language (the original or source language = the language of the text being translated) into meaningful words and sentences of a second language (known as the receptor or target language),

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which in our case is English. At issue ultimately is the need to be faithful to both languages—that is, to reproduce faithfully the meaning of the original text, but to do so with language that is comprehensible, clear, and natural.63

Bibles can be classified as to their translation philosophy, depending on where they fall on a spectrum between the two basic approaches: formal equivalence and functional equivalence. Formal equivalence seeks to produce an understandable English translation while retaining the form of the biblical language, including both words and grammar. This philosophy is often identified with words such as “literal,” “word-for-word,” or, in the case of the ESV, “essentially literal.” On the other hand, functional equivalence seeks to reproduce primarily the meaning of the biblical language into good, natural English. It was originally known as dynamic equivalence, but in linguistic circles that term has been considered obsolete since 1986.64 However, opponents of the method almost universally still refer to it as dynamic equivalence since, it would seem, the term dynamic tends to prejudice the case against functional equivalence.

E. While the NIV is generally placed in the functional equivalent camp, it actually, by design, falls roughly in the middle between the two poles of formal and functional equivalence. The former secretary of the CBT Ken Barker calls it a “middle ground” or “mediating” version.65 This can be roughly illustrated on a chart.66

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<tr>
<th>Formal Equivalence</th>
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<td>ASV, KJV, RSV</td>
<td>HCSB, NIV, NLT</td>
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<td>NASB, NRSV</td>
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<td>NKJV, ESV</td>
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F. Those who support more formal equivalent translations, like the ESV, almost always tie their preference to a belief that the doctrine of verbal inspiration naturally calls for a more literal translation philosophy.67 For example, in a book written to defend the translation philosophy of the ESV (and coming from the same publisher), Leland Ryken argues:

Three interrelated doctrines are particularly relevant to Bible translation. They are the authority of the Bible, the inspiration of biblical authors by the Holy Spirit, and the verbal or plenary (“full, complete”) inspiration of the Bible. I will make my own position clear right at

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63 How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth, p. 20.

64 Eugene Nida originally spoke of this translation method as dynamic equivalence but changed to the more appropriate functional equivalence because the word dynamic caused some translators to misunderstand and thus to misuse this method. See Jan de Waard and Eugene A. Nida, From One Language to Another: Functional Equivalence in Bible Translating (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986), pp. vii–viii.


66 This scale is not strictly proportional, but only shows the relative positions of the various versions.

67 See the comments by Martin, Radmacher and Hodge, and Scott at IV, B, p. 7 above. Also see Wayne Grudem, “Are Only Some Words Breathed Out by God?” in chapter one of Translating Truth, and the works noted in footnote 50 above.
the outset: I believe that these three doctrines lead logically to a translation that is essentially literal. Correspondingly, I believe that dynamic equivalence translations have led many evangelicals to compromise (perhaps unwittingly) the very doctrines of the Word that they theoretically espouse.68

This fallacy (and Ryken in particular) has been nicely addressed in an essay by Rod Decker entitled “Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and the Bible,” which I would commend for your reading.69 In reality both the form and meaning of Scripture are inspired. Meaning is inexorably tied to linguistic form. Those who argue that verbal inspiration demands a formal equivalent translation fail to understand that one cannot always transfer the form of the source language into the receptor language and convey the same meaning unless both languages have the same linguistic form. But since all languages differ in form (this is why they are different languages), the form must often be changed to preserve the meaning. Admittedly, how much change is at the heart of the debate.

G. Proponents of functional equivalence admit that though formal equivalent translations normally produce understandable English; it is sometimes not normal English. For example:

Mark 1:2
ESV: “Behold, I send my “messenger before your face.”
NIV11: “I will send my messenger ahead of you.”

2 Sam 18:25
ESV: The king said, “If he is alone, there is news in his mouth.”
NIV11: “The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.”

Luke 17:35
ESV: “There will be two women grinding together.”
NIV11: “Two women will be grinding grain together.”

For a hundred more examples, see the article by Mark Strauss, “Why the English Standard Version (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version.”70 In addition to the ESV’s claim that it is more accurate because of its “essentially literal” translation philosophy, it is also promoted for correctly handling the issue of gender-inclusive language, which is the major controversy associated with the 2011 revision of the NIV84. To that issue I now turn.


V. The Gender-Inclusive Language Controversy

A. A new problem for the NIV came in a firestorm started by the cover story of the March 29, 1997, issue of World magazine: “The Stealth Bible: The Popular New International Version Bible Is Quietly Going “Gender-neutral.” The lead article, “Femme Fatale: The Feminist Seduction of the Evangelical Church,” by assistant editor Susan Olasky claimed that by 2000 or 2001 the CBT planned to substitute a gender-neutral version for the present NIV. She noted that the New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition (NIvI) had already been published in Britain and quoted Larry Walker, a thirty-year member of the CBT: “Way back yonder when it first came up, no one was for [unisex language]. Now at the present time, almost everyone is for it.” Needless to say, Walker did not use the term unisex, but when he later declined to dissociate himself from the CBT, he was forced out of his position as tenured professor of Hebrew and chair of the Old Testament department at Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in Memphis. Olasky’s article did not actually discuss translation theory but was mainly a warning about creeping feminism in the church and efforts of leaders like Albert Mohler, president of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Wayne Grudem, president of the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), to combat it.

B. It might be well to step away for a moment and define what is meant by the term gender-neutral or gender-inclusive. I will quote Mark Strauss, a proponent of its use:

A simple definition would be a translation that seeks to avoid masculine terminology when the original author was referring to members of both sexes.

Gender-inclusive versions are those that intentionally use an inclusive term when this sense is intended by the author.

The only difference between “gender-inclusive” and “traditional” versions is that the former are intentionally sensitive to readers who might misunderstand masculine generic terms such as “man” or “brothers” as referring to males only or to readers who might feel excluded by their use.

The term is here defined as “a translation that explicitly seeks to include women when the original author so intended.”

In D. A. Carson’s book on the subject of gender language, he uses the terms inclusive-language, gender-inclusive, and gender-neutral interchangeably, though his preference seems to be gender-inclusive. In his volume, Straus uses gender-inclusive, but suggests

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71 A brief history of the initial stages of the controversy can be found in Mark L. Strauss, Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998), pp. 16–24, and Carson, The Inclusive Language Debate, pp. 21–38. For a detailed account, see Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, pp. 9–28.

72 pp. 12–15.

73 Ibid., p. 12.


75 Strauss, Distorting Scripture, pp. 20, 21.

that *gender-accurate* would be an appropriate term.\(^77\) In their recent book, Fee and Strauss consistently use *gender-accurate*.\(^78\) Those like Poythress and Grudem, who oppose the general trend of gender-inclusive language in translations, tend to prefer the term *gender-neutral*.\(^79\) But this term could be misleading, as Strauss notes, “if taken to mean that gender distinctions between men and women are being ‘neutralized’ or eliminated.”\(^80\) I believe the term *gender-inclusive* is probably the least prejudicial.\(^81\)

C. We now know that in August of 1992, five years before Olasky’s *World* magazine article appeared, the CBT had determined that its next revision of the NIV would be more gender-inclusive and drew up a set of principles.\(^82\) Gender-inclusive considerations were not entirely new. For example, the original (1963) NASB renders Romans 2:6, “who will render to every man according to his deeds,” while the NIV\(^84\) reads, “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’” The 1995 update NASB reads, “who will render to each person according to his deeds.”

D. Gender-inclusive versions began appearing in the 1980s:

1. 1985 — *New Jerusalem Bible* (Roman Catholic)
2. 1986 — *New American Bible, revised NT* (Roman Catholic)
3. 1987 — *New Century Version*
4. 1989 — *Revised English Bible*
5. 1990 — *New Revised Standard Version*
7. 1995 — *Contemporary English Version*
8. 1996 — *New Living Translation*

None of these versions caused much of a concern in the evangelical community. Nevertheless, Zondervan wanted to proceed cautiously with any changes to the NIV in this area, but the British publisher of the NIV, Hodder and Stoughton, went forward with the NIV\(^1\) NT in 1995 (produced by the CBT) and the complete Bible a year later.\(^83\) Though this version could not legally be sold in the United States, it suggested what was coming with the next revision of the NIV in the US, and thus provided the fodder for the *World* magazine cover story in 1997. Both Zondervan\(^84\) and the IBS\(^85\) bitterly

\(^{77}\) Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, p. 15

\(^{78}\) *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*, especially chapter 7, “Gender and Translation.”

\(^{79}\) Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, p. 6.

\(^{80}\) *Distorting Scripture*, p. 221, n. 17.

\(^{81}\) Admittedly, even it can be abused. Strauss observes that *gender-inclusive* sometimes has been “misconstrued to mean that the translation renders passages as inclusive regardless of the author’s intent” (Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, p. 15). An example is *The Inclusive New Testament* (1994), which is clearly a feminist version. For example, instead of “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord” (Eph 5:22, NIV\(^1\)), the INT reads, “You who are in committed relationships, be submissive to each other.”


\(^{84}\) “Dear Friend” letter dated 3 April 1997 from Tom Mockabbe, Vice President. I received the cover letter
complained that the article was biased and denied there was any radical feminist agenda in the planned revision of the NIV84. Another World article by Olasky, “The Battle for the Bible,” the title hearkening back to Harold Lindsell’s 1976 exposé, appeared on April 19, 1997, in which she argued that Zondervan was still committed to “unisex language,”86 The article included a quote from J. I. Packer, complaining about the “feminist edition” of the Bible.87 On May 14, Zondervan and the IBS issued a joint press release indicating that “they would continue to publish the 1984 NIV and at the same time they would ‘continue to move forward with plans for the possible publication of an updated edition of the present NIV’ after the year 2001.”88

E. In order to try to resolve the gender language issue, Dr. James Dobson of Focus for the Family called for a meeting of twelve evangelical scholars in Colorado Springs on May 27, 1997.89

Representatives of the NIV:
1. Bruce Ryskamp, President of Zondervan
2. Lars Dunberg, President of the IBS
3. Ken Barker, Secretary of the CBT
4. Ron Youngblood, member of the CBT

Concerned individuals:
5. Timothy Bayly, Executive Director, CBMW
6. Joel Belz, Publisher, World magazine
7. James Dobson, President, Focus on the Family
8. Wayne Grudem, President, CBMW
9. Charles Jarvis, Executive Vice President, Focus on the Family
10. John Piper, Senior Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis
11. Vern S. Poythress, Professor, Westminster Theological Seminary
12. R. C. Sproul, Chairman, Ligonier Ministries.

F. Before the meeting began, the IBS issued a new press release on the morning of May 27, that it was foregoing “all plans to develop a revised edition of the NIV.” Additionally, “the present (1984) NIV text will continue to be published. There are no plans for a further revised edition.”90 Apparently, what produced this turnaround was a meeting held a few days earlier in Nashville on May 19, where representatives of the Southern Baptist Convention’s Sunday School Board told Zondervan and the IBS that they would consider dropping the NIV as the Bible text for their curriculum if the NIV84 was revised with a packet of materials rebutting the World article.

85A press release include with Zondervan packet of materials.
86p 15.
87p. 16.
88Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, p. 19.
89Ibid., p. 20.
90Copy of the press release in my possession.
with gender-inclusive language. Nevertheless, the Dobson group meet on the 27th in what was later called the Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture, and agreed to a set of guidelines on the use of gender-related language in Bible translation. These Colorado Spring Guidelines (CSG) were slightly revised over the next few days and on June 3 a final draft was released to the press. After input from a number of scholars, more revisions were made and agreement reached on September 9, 1997, and subsequently published as an advertisement in the October 27, 1997, issue of Christianity Today.

G. Reports indicate that although the CSG were signed by two of the members of the CBT, most of the CBT members were not in agreement and indicated that the CSG were not binding on the CBT. In that same October 27, 1997, issue of Christianity Today, there was a debate, “Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?” between two friends, as they were described, Wayne Grudem (“Yes”) and Grant Osborne (“No”), both professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Then Mark Strauss, who would later become a member of the CBT in 2005, wrote and essay in the Journal of the Evangelical Society in June of 1998 critiquing the CSG in which he concluded that the “guidelines as a whole suffer from a misrepresentation of lexical semantics, from the confusion of form and meaning, and from a failure to encourage case-by-case exegesis.” In the same issue, Wayne Grudem wrote a response in which, among other things, he accused Strauss of misrepresenting the Guidelines at some points, of being wrong about the “standards for correct English today,” and, overall, of making arguments based upon “either oversights or mistakes.” Carson’s book, The Inclusive Language Debate, devotes a chapter to comparing and critiquing the “CBT Policy on Gender-Inclusive Language” and the CSG. I consider it an even-handed assessment.

H. Part of the problem in dealing with the issue of gender-inclusive translations is that it is part of the larger debate between complementarianism and egalitarianism. These terms, complementarian and egalitarian, are the commonly used labels for the two major viewpoints within broad evangelicalism concerning the role of women in the church. Complementarianism affirms

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92For Grudem’s account of the meeting, see Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, pp. 304–12. For Carson’s, see Inclusive Language Debate, pp. 33–34.
94Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, p. 312.
95The CSG can be found in numerous places. See Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, pp. 300–1; also http://www.bible-researcher.com/csguidelines.htm (accessed 12 October 2011).
97pp. 26–39.
100Chapter 5.
that men and women are equal in the image of God, but maintain complementary differences in role and function. In the home, men lovingly are to lead their wives and family as women intelligently are to submit to the leadership of their husbands. In the church, while men and women share equally in the blessings of salvation, some governing and teaching roles are restricted to men.\footnote{The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, “About Us,” available at \url{http://www.cbmw.org/About-Us} (accessed 12 October 2011).}


I. Egalitarianism is also commonly known as evangelical feminism. It is an outgrowth of the secular feminist movement that reemerged in North America in the early 1960s.\footnote{Mary A. Kassian, \textit{The Feminist Gospel} (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992), p. 15.} In the early 1970s conservative evangelicals began to incorporate feminist ideas into their theology.\footnote{Ibid., p. 206.} In 1974 biblical feminists founded the Evangelical Women’s Caucus (EWC). Though originally conservative, it eventually took a positive stance toward homosexuality. This led some members of the EWC to form a new organization in 1987 called Christians for Biblical Equality (CBE),\footnote{“Christian Feminists Form New Organization,” \textit{Christianity Today}, 16 October 1987, p. 44.} which today represents the more conservative egalitarian position. CBE believes that “all believers—without regard to gender, ethnicity or class—must exercise their God-given gifts with equal authority and equal responsibility in church, home and world.”\footnote{CBE Mission Statement, available at \url{http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/our-mission-and-history} (accessed 12 October 2011).}

So the CBE (egalitarianism) differs from the CBMW (complementarianism) in that the former sees no leadership role for the husband in marriage and also insists that there is no leadership role in the church that is reserved for men.

J. Opponents of gender-inclusive language believe, or are at least fearful, that the incorporation of such language is a concession to egalitarianism. J. I. Packer spoke for many when he said, “Adjustments made by what I call the feminist edition are not made in the interests of legitimate translation procedure. These changes have been made to pander to a cultural prejudice that I hope will be short-lived.”\footnote{Olasky, “The Battle for the Bible,” \textit{World}, 19 April 1997, p. 14.} It is commonly known that the CBT is made up of both complementarians and egalitarians, though Kenneth Barker remarked (in 1997), at the time of the initial dust up, that most of the CBT members believed like he did on the issue (i.e., complementarianism).\footnote{“Bible Translators Deny Gender Agenda,” p. 64. Grudem agreed with that assessment (\textit{Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy}, p. 305).} Both Carson and Strauss, who are themselves complementarians, have stated that they believe much of the opposition to gender-inclusive language stems from a desire to protect
complementarianism.\textsuperscript{109} Carson says,

Some scholars felt constrained to resign from the Board of Reference of CBMW, not because they disagreed with the complementarianism CBMW has defended, but because they disagreed (1) with its tightly linking the issue of complementarianism to that of gender-inclusive translations and (2) with at least some of the principles the critics had advanced in Colorado Springs and which CBMW subsequently endorsed.\textsuperscript{110}

Carson was one of those who resigned from the Board of Reference of the CBMW.\textsuperscript{111}

K. I have previously mentioned that one of the motivations behind the production of the ESV was the dissatisfaction with the translation philosophy of the NIV by a number of evangelical leaders such as John Piper and Wayne Grudem. But according to a report in World magazine, another important reason for the ESV was the fear that the new impending revision of the NIV would incorporate “unisex language.” In the article, “Decline of the NIV?” Tim and David Bayly suggested that the ESV “had its roots in discussions that took place before the May 1997 meeting called by James Dobson…to resolve the inclusive NIV issue.”\textsuperscript{112} On a parallel front, the same gender-language concerns about the impending NIV revision that provided impetus for the ESV also helped launch another version, the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). This project was begun in 1998 by Broadman and Holman.\textsuperscript{113} The NT was first published in 2000, followed by the OT in 2004. LifeWay Christian Resources, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), had used the NIV in all its literature. With their own version, no longer would literature produced by the Southern Baptist Convention be at the whim of the CBT. Now, as Albert Mohler put it, “We have a major translation we can control.”\textsuperscript{114}

VI. Today’s New International Version

A. As I previously noted, the CSG, which were signed by the twelve participants in 1997, included two members of the CBT (Barker and Youngblood) as well as the presidents of


\textsuperscript{111}Inclusive Language Debate, p. 35.

\textsuperscript{112}“Decline of the NIV?” p. 21.


\textsuperscript{114}“Southern Baptists Blast TNIV,” Christianity Today, 5 August 2002, p. 17.
Zondervan and the IBS. But things were not as settled as many had thought. Craig Blomberg explains:

The opponents of the NIVI believed that they had elicited a promise that the NIV would not be further revised, except in keeping with the new guidelines [CSG]. The CBT never understood themselves to be bound by what their two members signed, since they had never authorized them to participate in the conversations. While Zondervan’s president signed the guidelines, he believed he made it clear to the other participants that Zondervan would not be governed by the CSG in its publication of Bibles and that Zondervan would continue to publish at least the inclusive language Bibles it already carried in its Bible line [i.e., NRSV]. IBS apparently did endorse the guidelines but later decided they could not in good conscience continue to live by the restrictive nature of those guidelines.115

On January 18, 2002, IBS president Peter Bradley sent a certified letter to various evangelical leaders, indicating that it was going to publish an update to the NIV84 done by the CBT entitled Today’s New International Version (TNIV), and that, as a matter of “integrity,” the IBS was withdrawing its endorsement of the CSG, since the TNIV “does not conform to the technical guidelines set forth in the second part of the CSG document.”116

B. The TNIV NT was published in the spring of 2002, followed by the OT in 2005. The TNIV website at the time made the following claims:

The TNIV incorporates textual changes that reflect a better understanding of the meaning of the original Greek and Hebrew. The majority of the changes are made to better clarify passages or update colloquial English without altering the meaning. With 7 percent change from the NIV, the TNIV matches the NIV word-for-word most of the time. Updates include:

- Word changes that more precisely render the meaning of the original text and thus improve accuracy. For example, “Christ” is changed to “Messiah” when the underlying Greek functions as a title.
- A better understanding of the meaning of certain terms in the original Greek and Hebrew. References to “the Jews” are described more specifically, such as “the Jews there” or “the Jewish leaders,” when the context indicates a more precise group of people.
- Everyday language to improve understanding without changing meaning. For example, Mary is said to be “pregnant” rather than the archaic “with child,” thus reflecting language more commonly used today.
- Changes in paragraph structure, sentence structure, word order, punctuation, spelling and capitalization as well as minor word changes based on contemporary English style. For example, the TNIV omits the vocative “O” as it has fallen out of everyday use.
- Generic language where the meaning of the text was intended to include both men and women. For example, “sons of God” becomes “children of God,” and “brothers” becomes “brothers and sisters” when it is clear the original text never intended any specific gender reference.


The TNIV is not merely a gender-accurate edition of the NIV. More than 70 percent of the changes made were not related to gender.

- The TNIV retains male terminology, as present in the original text, for all references to God without exception.
- All gender-related changes in the TNIV are made to update masculine terminology that, in view of the immediate context, is often misunderstood and clearly used with generic intent. The changes do not have any doctrinal impact upon the text of Scripture.
- The TNIV sometimes uses a generic plural pronoun in the place of a masculine singular pronoun, making it more consistent with contemporary English practice.

C. At the time of the production of the TNIV, the CBT was composed of the following members:117

1. John Stek, Chairman of CBT, Calvin Theological Seminary
2. Donald H. Madvig, Vice-Chairman CBT, retired, pastor and professor
3. Kenneth L. Barker, Secretary of CBT, Dallas Theological Seminary
4. Gordon Fee, Regent College
5. Richard T. France, Parrish Minister, England and Wales
7. Walter Liefeld, Tyndale Theological Seminary, the Netherlands,
8. I. Howard Marshall, University of Aberdeen
9. Alan R. Millard, University of Liverpool
10. Douglas Moo, Wheaton College
12. Larry L. Walker, Beeson Divinity School
13. Bruce K. Waltke, Regent College
14. Herbert M. Wolf, Wheaton College
15. Ronald F. Youngblood, retired, Bethel Seminary San Diego

D. The opposition to the TNIV was furious, to put it mildly. In a cover story entitled “Five Days Early, Five Years Late,” World magazine blasted it two months before it was actually published.118 The SBC,119 PCA,120 and IFCA121 all passed resolutions against the TNIV. But the major opposition came from the CBMW, which produced a steady stream of critiques, beginning with the fall 2002 issue of the Journal of Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, which was mailed to all members of the Evangelical Theological Society. Most of these criticisms have been collected in six chapters that

11823 February 2002.
were added at the beginning of a reprinting of the book by Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, now titled *TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*. The editors of *Touchstone* magazine put the TNIV in the category of “heretical bibles” alongside the Bible of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their preference for orthodoxy was the RSV. There was at the time both an anti-TNIV website and a pro-TNIV website. In September 2002, Zondervan mailed all members of the Evangelical Theological Society a copy of the NT TNIV, along with copies of essays by D. A. Carson, Craig Blomberg, and Bruce Waltke, expressing general support for the TNIV. *Christianity Today* published “The TNIV Debate” in the October 7, 2002, between Mark Strauss (“Yes”) and Vern Poythress (“No”).

E. The TNIV in many respects was a good update of the NIV. Approximately 7% of the NIV text was changed in the TNIV, and less than 30% of those changes involved gender issues. By most accounts, those 70% were excellent changes. With possibly some hyperbole, Blomberg calls them “enormous.” After giving an extensive list of verses whose translation had been improved, he concludes:

>This list could be lengthened substantially but the point should be obvious. The TNIV consistently improves the NIV in the comparatively small number of places where the NIV really was not a terribly good translation. One could have hoped that even those critics who disagreed with the TNIV’s gender-inclusive language policy would have noted these improvements and given the new translation due credit in more balanced reviews.

F. No translation is perfect, and because the NIV has been in use for almost forty years, it has benefited from being the default translation in a number of commentary series, such that most of its weaknesses are well known. My own class notes (based on the NIV84) are filled with statements indicating places where the NIV84 could be improved, and the

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125www.tniv.info/qanda.php.


131Ibid., p. 190.

G. These improvements to the NIV84 do not generally enter into the evaluation of the TNIV because most criticism has been directed toward the more explosive issue of gender-inclusive language. Yet it is interesting, at least to me, that while I have read through the TNIV NT a couple of times for devotional purposes, the gender-inclusive language changes are not as obvious as one might think, nor do they appear to be overly problematic until a particular verse is pointed out. James Dobson, who called the meeting that produced the CSG, was surprised to learn in 1997 that his own organization, Focus on the Family, had been selling a simplified children’s Bible called the Adventures in Odyssey Bible that used gender-inclusive language, and yet this went unnoticed until gender-inclusive language in the NIV became an issue. My point here is, not whether gender-inclusive language is right or wrong, but only that it often goes unnoticed by the average reader.

VII. New International Version 2011 (NIV11)

A. In September 2009 Biblica (formerly IBS) announced a new update of the NIV, building on the NIV84 and the TNIV. The new NIV would be available in 2011, and both the NIV84 and the TNIV would be phased out. The presidents of both Biblica and Zondervan admitted that mistakes were made in the decisions that led to the release of the NIV1 and the TNIV. Doug Moo, chair of the CBT, said, “I don’t think any member [of the CBT] would stand by the NIV1 today,” though he added, “We feel much more comfortable about the TNIV.” A website was created to solicit comments from scholars and general readers during the rest of 2009. In October 2009 it was announced that William Mounce, who had served as the New Testament chair of the translation

133Poythress and Grudem, Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy, p. 311.


136Olsen, “Correcting the ‘Mistakes’ of TNIV and Inclusive NIV.”

137Ibid.

team for the ESV, would be joining the CBT for the NIV11.\textsuperscript{139}

B. At the time of the production of the NIV11, the CBT was composed of the following members:\textsuperscript{140}

1. Kenneth Barker, retired Professor
2. Craig Blomberg, Professor, Denver Seminary
3. Jeannine K. Brown, Professor, Bethel Seminary
4. Gordon Fee, Professor, Regent College
5. Richard T. France, retired, Principal of Wycliffe Hall Oxford
6. David Instone-Brewer, Scholar, Tyndale House, Cambridge
7. Karen H. Jobes, Professor, Wheaton College
8. Douglas Moo (Chairman), Professor, Wheaton College
9. William Mounce, Former Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary
10. Mark L. Strauss, Professor, Bethel Seminary, San Diego
11. Paul Swarup, Pastor, Christ Church, Noida, Delhi
12. Larry L. Walker, retired Professor, Beeson Divinity School
13. Bruce Waltke, retired Professor, Regent College
14. Michael Williams, Professor, Calvin Theological Seminary
15. Ronald Youngblood, Professor, Bethel Theological Seminary, San Diego

C. The revised edition (NIV11) appeared online\textsuperscript{141} in November 2010, and the printed edition was issued in March of 2011. Interestingly, two websites have been created to show the differences between the NIV84, TNIV, and NIV11.\textsuperscript{142} The CBT has its own website with videos featuring Doug Moo explaining the reasoning behind the NIV11 update and translation philosophy.\textsuperscript{143} It has also produced a written document covering the same ground: \textit{Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation (NCBT)}.\textsuperscript{144}


\textsuperscript{140}See \url{http://www.niv-cbt.org/translators} (accessed 14 October 2011); also see \url{http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv-translators.html} (accessed 14 October 2011).

\textsuperscript{141}\url{http://www.biblegateway.com} and \url{http://www.biblica.com}.


D. The NCBT first stresses:

About 95% of the text of the updated NIV is exactly the same as the 1984 text it replaces. The majority of what has changed involves comparatively minor matters of vocabulary, sentence structure, and punctuation: changes that move the NIV from the English of 1984 to the English of 2011. Other changes are more substantive, reflecting the advances in biblical scholarship over the last three decades.

The reasons for the changes, according to the NCBT fall into three basic categories:

1. Changes in English — For example, when most people hear “alien,” they think of an extraterrestrial being, so it was replaced with “foreigner” or similar words. Gen 23:4: “I am a foreigner and stranger among you . . .”

2. Changes in Scholarship — We now know that the word kataluma (καταλύμα) in Luke 2:7 more likely means “guest room,” not “inn.” Likewise, in Mark 15:27, we know that the two men crucified with Jesus are more correctly identified as “rebels” (lēstēs, λῃστῆς), not “robbers.”

3. Concern for Clarity — Phil 4:13 has often incorrectly been applied to anything in the Christian life, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.” But the context indicates the “everything” is limited to the ups and downs of life, the prosperous and adverse circumstances of life. So the text now reads, stressing the immediate context, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength.”

E. On the issue of gender-inclusive language, the NCBT assures us:

Nowhere in the updated NIV (nor in the TNIV, nor in any of the committee discussions leading up to either version) is there even the remotest hint of any inclusive language for God. The revisions solely surround inclusive language for mankind.

The NCBT notes that in making gender-language changes there has been a lack of accurate information at to what is the real state of spoken and written language. Translators have only relied on their own subjective experience and anecdotal evidence. Therefore, to remove some of this subjectivity the CBT initiated a relationship with Collins Dictionaries to make use of the Collins Bank of English, “one of the world’s foremost English language research tools, to conduct a major new study of changes in gender language. The Bank of English is a database of more than 4.4 billion words drawn from text publications and spoken word recordings from all over the world.” Both a summary and the full report are available online.145 The CBT argues that the information gathered in the report is a valuable tool, aiding it in its mission of expressing “the unchanging truths of the Bible in forms of language that modern English speakers find natural and easy to comprehend.”

F. The most significant findings that influenced the gender-inclusive decisions in the NIV11 were:

- The gender-neutral pronoun "they"("them"/"their") is by far the most common way that English-language speakers and writers today refer back to singular antecedents such as "whoever," "anyone," "somebody," "a person," "no one," and the like. Even in Evangelical sermons and books, where the generic "he," "him" and "his" are preserved

more frequently than in other forms of communication, instances of what grammarians are increasingly calling the “singular they” (“them” or “their”) appear three times more frequently than generic masculine forms. In other words, most English speakers today express themselves in sentences like these: “No one who rooted for the Chicago Cubs to be in a World Series in the last sixty years got their wish. They were disappointed time and time again,” or “The person who eats too many hot dogs in too short a period of time is likely to become sick to their stomach.” It is interesting to observe that this development is a throwback to a usage of English that existed prior to the solidification of the generic “he” as the only “proper” usage during the nineteenth century in Victorian England. Even the KJV occasionally used expressions like “…let each esteem other better than themselves” (Phi 2:3). For that matter, so did the Greek New Testament! In James 2:15-16, the Greek for “a brother or sister” (adelphos) is followed by plural verbs and predicate adjectives and referred back to with autois (“them”).

- English speakers around the world are using a variety of terms to refer to men and women together and for the human race collectively. Plural words such as “people,” “human beings,” and “humans” are very widely used. When it comes to terms that focus on humans in a collective sense, “man,” “mankind,” “humanity,” and “the human race” are all being used.

- "Forefather” has all but disappeared from the English language as a generic term, being replaced by “ancestor.” Even in Evangelical sermons and writings, “ancestor” is more than twice as common as “forefather.”

G. These kinds of findings led the CBT to adopt a set of guidelines that were applied (though not “inflexibly,” we are told) to the updating process of the NIV in places where the original Greek and Hebrew texts clearly indicate “an intended application to mixed groups of men and women and not just to individual men (or women) or groups of men (or women).” These guidelines are:

- Using plurals instead of singulars to deal with generic forms was avoided. Except for some instances where all alternatives proved awkward or potentially misleading, singular nouns or substantive participles in the biblical languages were translated with singular nouns or noun equivalents in English (“The one who…,” “the person who…,” “whoever…,” and the like).

- Using second person forms instead of third person forms to deal with generics was avoided. In other words, the translation does not read, “You who have this-or-that should do such-and-such,” to avoid saying “He who has this-or-that should do such-and-such.” The exception to this rule was when a second person form was already present in the immediate context and it would be poor English style not to preserve it throughout. For example, addressing a mixed-gender audience, we would say, “If any of you has your car on campus, may I get a ride home?” rather than “If any of you has his (or their) car on campus, may I get a ride home?”

- Singular “they,” “them” and “their” forms were widely used to communicate the generic significance of pronouns and their equivalents when a singular form had already been used for the antecedent. For example, “Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Mark 4:25); “How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them…” (Heb 10:29); or “Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check” (Jas 3:2b). At the same time, recognizing the diversity in modern English, a generic “he” was occasionally retained: “If I have rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him…” (Job 31:29).
• "People" and "humans" (and "human beings") were widely used for Greek and Hebrew masculine forms referring to both men and women. A variety of words—"humanity," "human race," "man," "mankind"—were used to refer to human beings collectively. As we noted above, modern English uses a variety of terms to refer to human beings collectively; and the committee decided to imitate that diversity in the translation, determining which expression fit best in each specific context. In making the decision whether to use "man" or "mankind," the committee often preferred the latter for the sake of clarity. "Man" can mean either "the human race" or "an individual (male) human being," and when a follow-up pronoun is required, the pronoun must be "he," creating the potential for misunderstanding. "Mankind," on the other hand, can only mean humanity as a whole, and the follow-up pronoun can be an inclusive "they." Nevertheless, the updated NIV often uses "man," particularly in memorable and/or proverbial phrases: for example, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27). Examples of texts that now have "mankind" where they didn't before include: "Let us make mankind in our image" (Genesis 1:26a); "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12); and "For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Tim 2:5).

• "Ancestors" was regularly preferred to "forefathers" unless a specific, limited reference to the patriarchs or to another all-male group is intended.

• "Brothers and sisters" was frequently used to translate adelphoi in the New Testament, especially in the vocative, when it was clear that both genders were in view: This decision reflects the consensus view among scholars (and with basis in the dictionaries) that plural adelphoi refers to both men and women equally. Footnotes now often appear, explaining that "the Greek word for ‘brothers and sisters’ (adelphoi) refers to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family." While some uses of "believers" were retained from the TNIV where "brothers and sisters" became too awkward, many were replaced by "brothers and sisters" to retain the familial connotations of adelphoi.

• While the Greek word anēr ("man" or "person") was frequently translated with masculine forms in English, it is clear in several contexts that the word refers to men and women equally (an option endorsed by major dictionaries of the Greek NT). The parallelism between James 1:7 and 8 suggests that anthropos and anēr are synonyms; hence, "That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do." In Acts, expressions addressing mixed-gender audiences such as "Fellow Israelites" (for andres Israēlitai) accurately capture the sense of the Greek. In Acts 17:22 andres Athēnaiōi cannot be rendered, "Fellow Athenians," because Paul was not from Athens. But "people of Athens" works well, especially since verse 34 shows that at least one woman, Damaris, was among those explicitly addressed.

K. It is early yet, but I do not believe we have seen quite the intensity of criticism as was leveled against the TNIV, though the recent action of the SBC at their June 2011 meeting was a surprise. The resolutions committee, chaired by Russell Moore, dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, rejected a resolution submitted to it condemning the NIV11, though it had approved such a resolution for the TNIV.146 However, when the resolution was brought up from the floor, it passed overwhelming.147 The CBT formally responded, issuing a strong objection to the SBC


147Ibid. See also Tim Dalrymple, “Southern Comfort,” World, 16 July 2011, p. 64. For the actual
The CBMW has issued a report in which it praises the CBT for the way “the entire translation process was carried on in a commendable spirit of transparency and openness.” They admit the NIV 11 is a great improvement over the TNIV, but they regret they cannot recommend it.149 The CBT issued a brief response to the CBMW report, saying that it was “a biased review that does not fairly represent the updated NIV.”150 As a thoroughgoing complementarian myself, I am in sympathy with the goals of the CBMW, but I find their arguments against the NIV 11 to sometimes be extreme and not particularly convincing. A recent article on their website by Mary Kassian, for example, “Ten Reasons Why the New NIV Bible is Bad for Women,” is fully of over-the-top statements, such as, “the Bible does not use predominantly male gendered language to exalt men; it uses it to exalt THE Man who paid the ultimate price to redeem His Bride”; and “making changes to gender language is based on the premise that God ought to have given gals and guys equal air time.”151

L. Since the NIV 84 is no longer available, those who have used it as their standard text, especially churches and pastors, will have to decide whether to switch to the NIV 11. One denomination that is facing this problem is the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The NIV 84 is the translation that Northwestern Publishing House (the synod's publisher) and the majority of WELS congregations and members use. They are officially studying the question of moving to the NIV 11 and have created a webpage with links to a number of helpful documents and studies prepared for their denomination that are well worth consideration by anyone studying the issue.152 The WELS Translation Evaluation Committee had an opportunity to meet with Doug Moo and question him about the CBT’s translation philosophy, including gender-inclusive language. They report:

In the matter of inclusive language, Moo stated that a great deal of the CBT’s time during the past two years had been devoted to a discussion of the topic. He stressed that the mission of the CBT was to put God’s Word in current natural English. He said that the decision to employ inclusive language was not stimulated by ideology or a theological agenda, but by a sincere desire to carry out their mission and as a reflection of their best understanding of the current state of English usage. In order to escape their own

resolution, see http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=121 (accessed 15 October 2011).


subjectivity on the matter, they made extensive use of a massive database of English usage that had been compiled and maintained by a disinterested third party. The CBT considered every verse where someone might be able to raise a question about inclusive language as it was used in translating the TNIV. Based upon the database, about a third of the changes in the TNIV were changed again.

Moo admitted that the committee wrestles with the topic of cultural shift as much as anything. The basic issue for the NIV translators was how to balance two desirable, yet somewhat competing outcomes. Naturally the CBT wanted the translation to reflect the realities of ancient near eastern culture. At the same time they wanted to make the Bible understandable to the contemporary reader who may not have ready access to good teaching. When it seemed particularly important to do so, they tried to use masculine language appropriate to that culture and time. At other times they used inclusive language when it seemed more important for the reader’s understanding. The committee was aware that this approach might lead to inconsistencies, but they were not operating under any preconceived notion that they had to make everything perfectly consistent or uniform.153

M. Though the use of gender-inclusive language is criticized, in fact, most modern translations have incorporated the concept to some degree. All translations fall in a spectrum that can be illustrated on the following chart.154

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Even the ESV uses a good deal more gender-inclusive language than earlier formal equivalence translations. I will cite just three examples:155

Rom 2:6
RSV: For he will render to every man according to his works:
ESV: For he will render to each one according to his works:

Rom. 3:4
RSV: By no means! Let God be true though every man be false,
ESV: By no means! Let God be true though every one were a liar,

Rom. 3:28
RSV: For we hold that a man is justified by faith apart from works of law.
ESV: For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of law.


154This scale is not strictly proportional, but only shows the relative positions of the various versions.

VIII. Conclusions

A. In my opinion those who have used the NIV84 will probably be able to switch to the NIV11 without too much concern. In fact, in most respects it is an improvement over the NIV84. The use of gender-inclusive language is, I believe, within the bounds of where the Koine of current English finds itself, but this is something that those who have concerns will have to judge on an individual basis. Rod Decker concludes:

in the area of gender language, the efforts of the NIV to accurately represent generic/inclusive reference in the donor language with suitable equivalents in the receptor language accurately conveys the intended reference in contemporary English. Though not every such choice will meet the approval of the critics, I would conclude that the choices of the CBT in this regard are defensible and express the Word of God accurately in English.156

As I mentioned at the beginning, I urge you to read Decker’s review. Are there “problems” with certain verses in the NIV11? Yes—but that is true for every version. Admittedly, there are always going to be more issues with any Bible version whose philosophy of translation leans more toward functional equivalence (and gender-inclusive language).

B. Twenty years ago I thought if people just knew what I knew about translation philosophy, they would decide for functional equivalence and see the advantages of the NIV. But now I know that many excellent scholars, for whom I have the highest regard, know what I know, and they still think functional equivalence is wrong and formal equivalence is the more valid (or only allowable) translation philosophy. Those individuals like Wayne Grudem and Vern Poythress are never going to approve of the NIV11. They did not like the NIV84 and nothing has changed (or will ever change, for that matter) to improve their opinion. I think Christian laymen (or should I say, “laypersons”?) who have preferred the NIV84 will make the switch effortlessly. It remains to be seen what pastors will do, given the nature of the controversy.

IX. Recommended Sources

A. How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth, by Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, Zondervan. This is, as they say, a book everyone should read. See this post by Andy Naselli for an outline of the book and helpful links to other sources: http://andynaselli.com/bible-translation.


D. The TNIV and the Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy by Vern S. Poythress and Wayne

A. Grudem, B&H. This is a reprinting of the authors’ earlier book *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* with some added material. The original is online at [https://www.cbmw.org/The-Gender-Neutral-Bible-Controversy](https://www.cbmw.org/The-Gender-Neutral-Bible-Controversy).