

THE HISTORY OF THE NIV TRANSLATION CONTROVERSY

by
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In this essay 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 will trace the translation history of the NIV, including the various disputes that have arisen from time to time. More than most versions, the NIV has faced a good deal of criticism since its inception, but, clearly, the recent controversy about gender-inclusive language has only intensified the censures. As I said, this essay will 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.²

TRANSLATION HISTORY OF THE NIV³

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.⁴ 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

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²For an excellent review, see Rodney J. Decker, “An Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version,” *Themelios* 36 (November 2011), available at http://thegospelcoalition.org/themelios/article/an_evaluation_of_the_2011_edition_of_the_new_international_version (accessed 11 August 2012).

³There are several accounts of the early history of the NIV: Carolyn J. Youngblood, “The *New International Version* Translation Project: Its Conception and Implementation,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (September 1978): 239–49; Burton L. Goddard, *The NIV Story: The Inside Story of the New International Version* (New York: Vantage, 1989); Richard K. Barnard, *God’s Word in Our Language: The Story of the New International Version* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989); John H. Stek, “The New International Version: How It Came to Be,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), available at http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/The_Challenge_of_Bible_Translation.pdf (accessed 11 August 2012).

⁴A video testimony by Long is available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-story/the-original-inspiration> (accessed 8 October 2011).

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.⁵

The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV) itself was a direct descendent of the KJV.⁶ 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 of 1769 prepared by Dr. Benjamin Blayney for Oxford University Press, which has become known as the Oxford standard edition.⁷ 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 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 with the result 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 groups, but its rather awkward literalness and retention of much of the same Elizabethan English meant that it was never much of a challenge to KJV and was ultimately unable to displace it in most churches.

KJV 1611 → KJV 1769 → RV → ASV

In 1929 the International Council of Religious Education (later part of the National Council of Churches) obtained the copyright to the ASV. The Standard Bible Committee was formed to oversee any future revisions.⁸ 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

⁵Youngblood, "New International Version Translation Project," 241.

⁶For a history of the RSV, see Bruce M. Metzger, "The Story Behind the Making of the Revised Standard Version of the Bible," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 1 (1978): 189–200, available at <http://scdc.library.ptsem.edu/mets/mets.aspx?src=PSB1978014&div=4> (accessed 11 August 2012).

⁷Paul D. Wegner, *The Journey from Texts to Translations: The Origin and Development of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 312.

⁸Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 70–71.

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).⁹

The CRC rejected the RSV for use in its churches in 1954, thinking it would never gain acceptance among evangelicals.¹⁰ The CRC had approved the ASV in 1926, but it never displaced the KJV in its churches.¹¹ 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 1961.¹² 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 a costly one. 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 *New American Standard Bible* (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 translation of the Bible...as a collegiate endeavor of evangelical scholars.”¹³ 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).¹⁴ The CRC officially pulled out of the project in 1966, but a number of leading CRC scholars continued to participate independently in the project.¹⁵

⁹Both 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*, 87ff.

¹⁰Youngblood, “*New International Version* Translation Project,” 241–42; Stek, “The New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 238–40, 43.

¹¹See http://www.crcna.org/pages/beliefs_bibletranslations.cfm (accessed 11 August 2012).

¹²Youngblood, “The *New International Version* Translation Project,” 241; Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 237.

¹³Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 244.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 248. The constitution is available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/questions> (accessed 11 August 2012).

¹⁵Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 133.

The original CBT members (from 1965 to 1983):¹⁶

1. E. Leslie Carlson, Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary
Carlson (died) was replaced in 1968 by Larry Walker (Southwestern Baptist Seminary)¹⁷
2. Edmund P. Clowney, Westminster Theological Seminary
Clowney (resigned) was replaced in 1968 by Robert D. Preus (Concordia Theological Seminary)¹⁸
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)¹⁹
8. Robert Mounce,²⁰ Bethel College (St. Paul)
Mounce (resigned) was replaced in 1967 by Youngve R. Kindberg (New York Bible Society)²¹
Kindberg (resigned) was replaced in 1983 by Donald J. Wiseman (University of London)²²
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 Seminary)²³
11. Charles C. Ryrie, Dallas Theological Seminary
Ryrie (resigned) was replaced in 1979 by Ronald F. Youngblood (Bethel Seminary, San Diego)²⁴
12. Francis R. Steele, North Africa Mission
Steele (resigned) was replaced in 1971 by William J. Martin (Regent College)²⁵
Martin (died) was replaced in 1980 by Bruce K. Waltke (Regent

¹⁶Stek, "New International Version: How It Came to Be," 245.

¹⁷Ibid., 252.

¹⁸Ibid., 251.

¹⁹Ibid., 252.

²⁰Interestingly, 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.

²¹Stek, "New International Version: How It Came to Be," 248.

²²Ibid., 261.

²³Ibid., 256.

²⁴Ibid., 261.

²⁵Ibid., 253.

College)²⁶

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

The CBT chose teams of scholars (over 100²⁷) to do the actual translation work and required each of them to affirm a statement on the inerrancy of Scripture.²⁸ In 1968 Edwin H. Palmer was appointed as executive secretary to oversee the day-to-day operation of the CBT.²⁹ 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).³⁰ 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.³¹ The New York Bible Society added International (NYBSI) to its name in 1971,³² 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.

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.³³ 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 NYBSI had to sell its own building to meet expenses.³⁴ However, even that was not sufficient, and in 1976 Zondervan agreed to advance the Bible Society up to \$250,000.³⁵ 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,

²⁶Ibid., 261.

²⁷See <http://www.biblica.com/niv/translators> (accessed 11 August 2012).

²⁸“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 <http://www.niv-cbt.org/category/questions/translators-committee-on-bible-translation> [accessed 11 August 2012]).

²⁹Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 244.

³⁰Ibid., 255.

³¹Barnard, *God’s Word in Our Language*, 89.

³²Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 253–54.

³³Ibid., 254.

³⁴Barnard, *God’s Word in Our Language*, 170.

³⁵Stek, “New International Version: How It Came to Be,” 255.

based on criticisms and proposals that had accumulated over the years since the initial publication of the NT in 1973.³⁶

RECEPTION OF THE NIV

It seems fair to say, looking back, that from the beginning the NIV was well received in most evangelical and a few fundamental circles.³⁷ Certainly though, even initially, there were dissenters. Stewart Custer of Bob Jones University 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.”³⁸ 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.”³⁹

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 400 years, and it remains so today. The August 2012 figures from the Christian Booksellers Association are as follows:⁴⁰

1. *New International Version*
2. *King James Version*
3. *New King James Version*
4. *New Living Translation*
5. *Common English Bible*
6. *English Standard Version*
7. *Holman Christian Standard Bible*
8. *Reina Valera 1960* (Spanish)
9. *New International Reader’s Version*
10. *New American Standard Bible*

These figures vary from month to month, but the NIV is consistently in first place.

The criticism of the NIV seems to have been infrequent early on, but as it grew in popularity, it began to attract numerous negative

³⁶Ibid., 257. The NIV84 “Preface” is available at <http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv-preface.html> (accessed 11 August 2012).

³⁷Well-known fundamentalist pastor Dr. Earnest Pickering was using the NIV in his pulpit at his church (Emmanuel Baptist, Toledo, OH) in the early 1980s.

³⁸“Twisted Translations,” *Faith for the Family*, March/April 1974, 6.

³⁹David P. Scaer, “The New International Version—Nothing New,” *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 43 (June 1979): 243.

⁴⁰Available at http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf (accessed 11 August 2012).

critiques, chiefly due to its translation philosophy, commonly called dynamic equivalence, which was a departure from the more literal philosophy that had traditionally been followed in the line of Bibles that trace their heritage to the KJV. At least partly in reaction to the previously mentioned conservative rejection of the RSV, the Lockman Foundation created a conservative revision of the ASV, the previously mentioned *New American Standard Bible* (NT, 1963; OT, 1971; updated 1995). The NASB followed the literal translation philosophy of the ASV.

KJV 1611 → KJV 1769 → RV → ASV → NASB

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.⁴¹ 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.⁴² But the critics became more vocal. Robert Martin 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.”⁴³ Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges also found the dynamic equivalence of the NIV to be unacceptable, associated with “a low view of inspiration.”⁴⁴ In an article titled “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.”⁴⁵ Robert L. Thomas also weighed in against dynamic equivalence with a couple of articles.⁴⁶ Ken Barker, who had become

⁴¹I 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, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 59–65), it seems to have reached critical mass when some fundamentalist Christians began to lay aside the KJV for modern versions. See my “The Modern KJV-Only Movement,” available at <http://dbts.edu/blog/?p=2117> (accessed 11 August 2012).

⁴²*NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986).

⁴³*Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1989), 69.

⁴⁴*The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation* (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1990), 12.

⁴⁵*Westminster Theological Journal* 48 (Fall 1986): 361.

⁴⁶“Bible Translations: The Link between Exegesis and Expository Preaching,” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1990): 53–73; “Dynamic Equivalence: A Method of Translation or a System of Hermeneutics?” *Master’s Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1990): 149–75.

sort of the chief spokesperson for the NIV, produced two volumes designed to answer some of the critics.⁴⁷

CONTINUED CONTROVERSY OVER TRANSLATION PHILOSOPHY

In the last twenty-five 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."⁴⁸ Popular preacher and author 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.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Kenneth L. Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); idem, *The Balance of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999).

⁴⁸E.g., Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville: B&H, 2000), 57–81; Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "On Bible Translation and Hermeneutics," in *After Pentecost: Language and Biblical Interpretation*, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 284–311; Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 79–102; E. Earle Ellis, "Dynamic Equivalence Theory, Feminist Ideology and Three Recent Bible Translations," *Expository Times* (October 2003): 7–12; Wayne Grudem, Leland Ryken, C. John Collins, Vern S. Poythress, and Bruce Winter, *Translating Truth: The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2005); Wayne Grudem, *Why Is My Choice of a Bible Translation So Important?* (Louisville: Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, 2005); Thomas A. Howe, "Critique of Dynamic or Functional Equivalency Translation," *Christian Apologetics Journal* (Spring 2006): 1–44; Leland Ryken, *Understanding English Bible Translations* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 69–117.

⁴⁹"Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV," 1 January 2004, available at <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/good-english-with-minimal-translation-why-bethlehem-uses-the-esv> (accessed 12 August 2012). Oddly, to me, Piper immediately says: "Now let me say again that the NIV is the precious Word of God." According to Dr. Rod Decker, at the 2002 annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society in Colorado Springs, during a panel discussion, Piper vilified the NIV in such strong language that one of his fellow panelists, Wayne Grudem, immediately repudiated Piper's remarks. See Rodney J.

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].⁵⁰

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,⁵¹ and John R. Rice ran ads for it in *The Sword of the Lord*.⁵² It was only when the OT was published in 1952 with its conjectural emendations to the Hebrew text and controversial messianic translations (e.g., Isa 7:14) that serious opposition came forth.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴ In 1970 Donald Gray Barnhouse defended it in an article in *Eternity* magazine.⁵⁵ The faculty at Fuller Theological Seminary, in particular, strongly supported the RSV, including the Isaiah 7:14 translation.⁵⁶ John Piper went to Fuller for his seminary training, so his fondness for the RSV, first kindled at Wheaton, would not have

Decker, "The English Standard Version: A Review Article," *Journal of Ministry & Theology* 8 (Fall 2004): 8.

⁵⁰"Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV."

⁵¹"The Revised Standard Version of the New Testament: Editorial Book Review," quoted in Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 86.

⁵²See Rolland D. McCune, "Doctrinal Non-Issues in Historic Fundamentalism," *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* (Fall 1996): 174–75, n. 13.

⁵³John R. Rice eventually apologized for the *Sword's* support of the RSV (*ibid.*).

⁵⁴George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 137; Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 133. The Christian Reformed Church also approved the NIV in 1980, the NRSV in 1992, the TNIV in 2006, the ESV in 2007, and the NLT in 2008. Interestingly, the NASB was approved for Bible study in 1982, but not for use in churches. See http://www.crcna.org/pages/beliefs_bibletranslations.cfm (accessed 12 August 2012).

⁵⁵"I Have Read the RSV," April 1970, 6.

⁵⁶Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures*, 129.

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.

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.⁵⁷

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

⁵⁷“Good English With Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV.”

⁵⁸Tim and David Bayly, “Decline of the NIV?” *World*, 5 June 1999, 21.

⁵⁹See <http://www.esv.org/esv/scholarship/trusted-scholarship> (accessed 12 August 2012). For a listing of the Committee members, see <http://www.esv.org/esv/scholarship/translation-oversight-committee> (accessed 12 August 2012).

⁶⁰“About the ESV Translation,” available at <http://www.esv.org/esv/translation/about> (accessed 12 August 2012). For a helpful review of the ESV, see Decker, “The English Standard Version: A Review Article,” 5–56.

“significant corrections in the translation of key texts,”⁶¹ which meant, 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.”⁶²

Given the continuing controversy concerning the “dynamic equivalence” translation philosophy of the NIV, a few words are in order.⁶³ 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), 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.⁶⁴

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 natural English. It was originally known as dynamic equivalence, but in linguistic circles that term has been considered obsolete since 1986.⁶⁵ 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.

⁶¹“About the ESV Translation.”

⁶²“Good English with Minimal Translation: Why Bethlehem Uses the ESV.”

⁶³Especially helpful here is Gordon D. Fee and Mark L. Strauss, *How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), chapter 2, “The Meaning and Task of Translation”; and equally important, Mark L. Strauss, “Bible Translation and the Myth of ‘Literal Accuracy,’” *Review and Expositor* 108 (Spring 2011): 169–93. The latter is a significantly revised form of his earlier “Form Function, and the ‘Literal Meaning’ Fallacy in English Bible Translation,” *Bible Translator* (July 2005): 153–68. See also D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), chapter 3.

⁶⁴*How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*. 20.

⁶⁵Eugene 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, 1986), vii–viii.

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.⁶⁶ This can be roughly illustrated on the following chart.⁶⁷

Formal Equivalence				Functional Equivalence	
ASV	KJV	RSV	HCSB	NIV	NLT
	NASB	NRSV		NET	
		NKJV			
		ESV			

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.⁶⁸ 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 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.⁶⁹

This supposed necessary corollary between verbal inspiration and formal equivalence translation philosophy is fallacious.⁷⁰ In reality both the form and meaning of Scripture are inspired. Meaning is inexorably tied to linguistic form. Those who argue that verbal inspiration

⁶⁶Kenneth L. Barker, “Bible Translation Philosophies with Special Reference to the New International Version,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 57, 58.

⁶⁷This scale is not strictly proportional, but only shows the relative positions of the various versions.

⁶⁸See the comments by Martin, Radmacher and Hodges, and Scott on p. 9 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 48 above.

⁶⁹*The Word of God in English*, 126–27. See the helpful review by Mark L. Strauss, review of *The Word of God in English*, by Leland Ryken, *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (December 2003): 738–40. Ryken has recently rewritten this book, now titled *Understanding English Bible Translations: The Case for an Essentially Literal Approach* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

⁷⁰This fallacy (and Ryken in particular) has been nicely addressed in an essay by Rod Decker (“Verbal-Plenary Inspiration and the Bible,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 11 [2006]: 25–61).

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 a major reason why they are different languages), the form must often be changed to preserve the meaning. Admittedly, however, there is a legitimate debate over how much change is necessary.

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 in the ESV reads, “Behold, I send my messenger before your face.” This may not seem that strange to those who have grown up on the Bible since this is how the KJV renders the verse. “Before your face” is a literal rendering of the Greek (μου πρὸ προσώπου σου), but fails to accurately render the Greek idiom,⁷¹ which is correctly captured by the NIV11, “I will send my messenger ahead of you.” Another random example is 2 Sam 18:25 in the ESV, “The king said, ‘If he is alone, there is news in his mouth.’” Again, this is a literal rendering of the Hebrew words but is not intelligible in the context. A more functional rendering is necessary: “The king said, ‘If he is alone, he must have good news’” (NIV11).⁷²

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 NIV. To that issue I now turn.

THE GENDER-INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE CONTROVERSY⁷³

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.⁷⁴ 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

⁷¹BDAG, s.v. “πρόσωπον,” 888.

⁷²For a hundred more examples, see Mark Strauss, “Why the *English Standard Version* (ESV) Should Not Become the Standard English Version,” available at <http://zondervan.typepad.com/files/improvingesv2.pdf> (accessed 13 August 2012).

⁷³A 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 Press, 1998), 16–24, and Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate*, 21–38. For a detailed account, see Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 9–28.

⁷⁴pp. 12–15.

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.”⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ Olasky’s article did not actually discuss translation theory but was mainly a warning about creeping feminism in the church and a description of efforts by leaders like Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Wayne Grudem, president of the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), to combat it.

It might be well to step back 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.”⁷⁷

In D. A. Carson’s book on the subject of gender language (*Inclusive Language Debate*), he uses the terms *inclusive-language*, *gender-inclusive*, and *gender-neutral* interchangeably, though his preference seems to be *gender-inclusive*.⁷⁸ In his volume, Strauss uses *gender-inclusive*, but suggests that *gender-accurate* would be an appropriate term.⁷⁹ In their recent book, Fee and Strauss consistently use *gender-accurate*.⁸⁰ Those like Poythress and Grudem, who oppose the general trend of gender-inclusive language in translations, tend to prefer the term *gender-neutral*.⁸¹ But this term could be misleading, as Strauss notes, “if taken

⁷⁵“The Stealth Bible,” 12.

⁷⁶“Publishing: Bible Translators Deny Gender Agenda,” *Christianity Today*, 14 July 1997, 62.

⁷⁷Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, 20, 21.

⁷⁸pp. 14–15.

⁷⁹Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, 15.

⁸⁰*How to Choose a Translation for All Its Worth*, especially chapter 7, “Gender and Translation.”

⁸¹Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 6.

to mean that gender distinctions between men and women are being ‘neutralized’ or eliminated.”⁸² The term *gender-inclusive* is probably the least prejudicial.⁸³

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 NIV84 would be more gender-inclusive, and thus drew up a set of principles.⁸⁴ Gender-inclusive considerations were not entirely new; they had already been appearing in English versions here and there without drawing any criticism. For example, the original (1963) NASB rendered Romans 2:6, “who will render to every man according to his deeds,” while the NIV84 reads: “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’” The 1995 update NASB also changed “man” to “person”: “who will render to each person according to his deeds.”

Purposeful gender-inclusive versions began appearing in the 1980s:

1985 — *New Jerusalem Bible* (Roman Catholic)

1986 — *New American Bible*, revised NT (Roman Catholic)

1987 — *New Century Version*

1989 — *Revised English Bible*

1990 — *New Revised Standard Version*

1992 — *Good News Bible*, 2nd ed.

1995 — *Contemporary English Version*

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 NIVI NT in 1995 (produced by the CBT) and the complete Bible a year later.⁸⁵ Though this version could not legally be sold in the United States, the NIVI 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 Zondervan⁸⁶ and the IBS⁸⁷ bitterly complained

⁸²*Distorting Scripture*, 221, n. 17.

⁸³Admittedly, 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*, 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, NIV11), the INT reads, “You who are in committed relationships, be submissive to each other.”

⁸⁴Carson, *Inclusive Language Debate*, 26, 39, 41–44.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, 26–27.

⁸⁶“Dear Friend” letter dated 3 April 1997 from Tom Mockabbe, Vice President. I personally received the cover letter with a packet of materials from Zondervan rebutting the *World* article.

that the article was biased and denied there was any radical feminist agenda in the planned revision of the NIV. 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."⁸⁸ The article included a quote from J. I. Packer, complaining about the "feminist edition" of the Bible.⁸⁹ 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."⁹⁰

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, 1997:⁹¹

Representatives of the NIV:

Bruce Ryskamp, President of Zondervan

Lars Dunberg, President of the IBS

Ken Barker, Secretary of the CBT

Ron Youngblood, member of the CBT

Concerned individuals:

Timothy Bayly, Executive Director, CBMW

Joel Belz, Publisher, *World* magazine

James Dobson, President, Focus on the Family

Wayne Grudem, President, CBMW

Charles Jarvis, Executive Vice President, Focus on the Family

John Piper, Senior Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis

Vern S. Poythress, Professor, Westminster Theological Seminary

R. C. Sproul, Chairman, Ligonier Ministries.

Before the meeting began, the IBS issued a new press release on the morning of May 27, indicating 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."⁹² Apparently, what produced this turnabout 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

⁸⁷A press release included with Zondervan packet of materials.

⁸⁸p. 15.

⁸⁹p. 16.

⁹⁰Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 19.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, 20.

⁹²Copy of the press release in my possession.

the NIV as the Bible text for their curriculum if the NIV was revised with gender-inclusive language.⁹³ Nevertheless, the Dobson group met 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.⁹⁴ 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.⁹⁵ After input from a number of scholars, more revisions were made and agreement reached on September 9, 1997.⁹⁶ These Guidelines were subsequently published as an advertisement in the October 27, 1997, issue of *Christianity Today*.⁹⁷

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.⁹⁸ 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.⁹⁹ Then Mark Strauss, who would later become a member of the CBT in 2005, wrote an 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.”¹⁰⁰ 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.”¹⁰¹ Carson’s book, *The Inclusive Language Debate*, devotes a chapter to comparing and critiquing the “CBT Policy on Gender-Inclusive Language” and the

⁹³Susan Olasky, “Bailing Out of the Stealth Bible, *World*, 14/21 June, 1997, 13.

⁹⁴For Grudem’s account of the meeting, see Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 304–12. For another, see Carson, *Inclusive Language Debate*, 33–34.

⁹⁵*CBMW News*, June 1997, 6.

⁹⁶Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 312.

⁹⁷The CSG can be found in numerous places. See Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 300–301.

⁹⁸“Bible Translators Deny Gender Agenda,” *Christianity Today*, 14 July 1997, 63.

⁹⁹pp. 26–39.

¹⁰⁰“Linguistic and Hermeneutical Fallacies in the Guidelines Established at the ‘Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture,’” 41 (June 1998): 260.

¹⁰¹“A Response to Mark Strauss’ Evaluation of the Colorado Springs Translation Guidelines,” 285–86.

CSG.¹⁰² I consider it to be an even-handed assessment.

Part of the problem in dealing with the issue of gender-inclusive translations is that it is an element 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

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.¹⁰³

The complementarian position is represented by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), which was officially formed in 1987.¹⁰⁴

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.¹⁰⁵ In the early 1970s conservative evangelicals began to incorporate feminist ideas into their theology.¹⁰⁶ 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),¹⁰⁷ 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."¹⁰⁸ 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.

Opponents of gender-inclusive language believe, or are at least

¹⁰²Chapter 5.

¹⁰³The Council on Biblical Manhood & Womanhood, "About Us," available at <http://www.cbmw.org> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹⁰⁴Wayne Grudem, "Personal Reflections on the History of CBMW and the State of the Gender Debate," *Journal for Biblical Manhood & Womanhood* 14 (Spring 2009): 14.

¹⁰⁵Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992), 15.

¹⁰⁶*Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁰⁷"Christian Feminists Form New Organization," *Christianity Today*, 16 October 1987, 44.

¹⁰⁸CBE Mission Statement, available at <http://www.cbeinternational.org/?q=content/our-mission-and-history> (accessed 26 August 2012).

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.”¹⁰⁹ Today, the CBT is made up of both complementarians and egalitarians,¹¹⁰ though Kenneth Barker remarked at the time of the initial dust up (1997) that most of the CBT members believed like he did on the issue (i.e., complementarianism).¹¹¹ 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.¹¹² 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.¹¹³

Carson was one of those who resigned from the Board of Reference of the CBMW.¹¹⁴

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, including 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.”¹¹⁵ On a parallel front, the same gender-language

¹⁰⁹Olasky, “The Battle for the Bible,” *World*, 19 April 1997, 14.

¹¹⁰“A Brief Response from the Committee on Bible Translation to the Review of the updated NIV by the Committee on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood,” available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-cbmw-review.pdf> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹¹¹“Bible Translators Deny Gender Agenda,” 64. Grudem agreed with that assessment (*Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 305).

¹¹²*Inclusive Language Debate*, 37; Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, 203; idem, “Current Issues in the Gender-Language Debate: A Response to Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem,” in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 136.

¹¹³*Inclusive Language Debate*, 35.

¹¹⁴*Ibid.*, 200, n. 19. Nevertheless, Carson was the featured speaker at CBMW’s Different by Design conference in 2009.

¹¹⁵“Decline of the NIV?” 21.

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.¹¹⁶ 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 previously used the NIV in all its literature. With their own version, no longer would literature produced by the SBC be at the whim of the CBT. Now, as Albert Mohler put it, “We have a major translation we can control.”¹¹⁷

TODAY’S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

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 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 [e.g., 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.¹¹⁸

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 NIV done by the CBT titled *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

¹¹⁶“Broadman & Holman Publishers Announces New Bible Translation,” Baptist Press, 7 May 1999, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=929> (accessed 26 August 2012). Actually, the project began in 1984 when Arthur Farstad, former general editor of the *New King James Version*, began work on a new translation based on the Majority Text Greek text that had been edited by himself and Zane Hodges. Broadman and Holman partnered with Farstad in 1998. The project was expanded to include a NT based on the Nestle-Aland text and an electronic edition based on the Majority Text, but Farstad died shortly afterward. Edwin Blum took over as general editor and the Majority Text edition was dropped (<http://www.bible-researcher.com/csb.html> [accessed 14 October 2011]).

¹¹⁷“Southern Baptists Blast TNIV,” *Christianity Today*, 5 August 2002, 17.

¹¹⁸Craig L. Blomberg, “Today’s New International Version: The Untold Story of a Good Translation,” *Bible Translator* 56 (July 2005): 188–89. Blomberg became a member of the CBT in 2008.

conform to the technical guidelines set forth in the second part of the CSG document.”¹¹⁹

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

¹¹⁹A copy of the letter can be found in a web archive at http://web.archive.org/web/20080511194333/http://www.gendernutralbibles.com/ibs_letter_011802.php# (accessed 26 August 2012). See also “Should We Trust the IBS?” *World*, 23 February 2002, 23.

masculine singular pronoun, making it more consistent with contemporary English practice.

At the time of the production of the TNIV, the CBT was composed of the following members:¹²⁰

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, former seminary professor
4. Gordon Fee, Regent College
5. Richard T. France, Parrish Minister England and Wales
6. Karen H. Jobes, Westmont College
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
11. Martin J. Selman, Spurgeon's College London
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

The opposition to the TNIV was furious, to put it mildly. In a cover story titled "Five Days Early, Five Years Late," *World* magazine blasted the TNIV two months before it was actually published.¹²¹ The SBC,¹²² PCA,¹²³ and IFCA¹²⁴ 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 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*.¹²⁵ The editors of *Touchstone* magazine put

¹²⁰See <http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv-translators.html> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹²¹23 February 2002.

¹²²See <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1118> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹²³See <http://www.bible-researcher.com/tniv5.html> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹²⁴See <http://ifca.org/home/140001498/140001498/pdf/Resolutions1996-2003.pdf> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹²⁵Nashville: B&H, 2004. See the helpful review of their earlier book by Heinrich von Siebenhthal, review of *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, by Vern Poythress

the TNIV in the category of “heretical bibles” alongside the Bible of the Jehovah’s Witnesses. Their preference for orthodoxy was the RSV.¹²⁶ There was at the time both an anti-TNIV website¹²⁷ and a pro-TNIV website.¹²⁸ In September 2002, Zondervan mailed all members of the Evangelical Theological Society a copy of the TNIV NT, along with copies of essays by D. A. Carson,¹²⁹ Craig Blomberg,¹³⁰ and Bruce Waltke,¹³¹ expressing general support for the TNIV. *Christianity Today* published “The TNIV Debate” in the October 7, 2002, issue between Mark Strauss (“Yes”) and Vern Poythress (“No”).¹³²

As noted above, approximately 7% of the NIV text was changed in the TNIV, and less than 30% of those changes involved gender issues.¹³³ By most accounts, the 70% of the changes that did not involve gender issues were genuinely positive improvements. With possibly some hyperbole, Blomberg calls them “enormous.”¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵

But Blomberg’s hopes were clearly in vain. Any genuine improvements to the NIV were completely overshadowed by the controversy

and Wayne Grudem, *Trinity Journal* 23 (Spring 2002): 111–18.

¹²⁶April 2002, 4–5, available at <http://www.touchstonemag.com/archives/article.php?id=15-03-004-e> (accessed 26 August 2012).

¹²⁷www.genderneutralbibles.com.

¹²⁸www.tniv.info/qanda.php.

¹²⁹“The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—and Other Limits, Too.” Reprinted in *The Challenge of Bible Translation*, ed. Glen G. Scorgie, Mark L. Strauss, and Steven M. Voth (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), chapter 3.

¹³⁰“*Today’s New International Version: The Untold Story of a Good Translation*,” available at <http://www.denverseminary.edu/article/todays-new-international-version-the-untold-story-of-a-good-translation> (accessed 26 August 2012). A revised edition appeared in *Bible Translator* 56 (July 2005): 187–211.

¹³¹“Personal Reflections on the TNIV.” Reprinted in *Crux* 39 (March 2003): 27–31.

¹³²pp. 36–45.

¹³³Blomberg, “*Today’s New International Version: The Untold Story of a Good Translation*,” 187–88.

¹³⁴*Ibid.*, 190.

¹³⁵*Ibid.*, 197–98. See also *idem*, “Better Things in This Case: The Superiority of Today’s International Version in Hebrews,” *Bible Translator* 55 (July 2004): 310–18.

involving the TNIV's use of gender-inclusive language

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION 2011

In September 2009 Biblica (formerly IBS) announced a new update of the NIV, building on the NIV84 and the TNIV.¹³⁶ The new NIV would be available in 2011, and both the NIV84 and the TNIV would be phased out.¹³⁷ The presidents of both Biblica and Zondervan admitted that mistakes were made in the decisions that led to the release of the NIVI and the TNIV.¹³⁸ Doug Moo, chair of the CBT, said, "I don't think any member [of the CBT] would stand by the NIVI today," though he added, "We feel much more comfortable about the TNIV."¹³⁹ A website was created¹⁴⁰ 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 NT chair of the translation team for the ESV, would be joining the CBT for the NIV11.¹⁴¹

At the time of the production of the NIV11, the CBT was composed of the following members:¹⁴²

1. Kenneth Barker, retired seminary 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 (Chair), Professor, Wheaton College
9. William Mounce, Former Professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological

¹³⁶Ted Olsen, "Correcting the 'Mistakes' of TNIV and Inclusive NIV, Translators Will Revise NIV in 2011," *Christianity Today* blog, entry posted 1 September 2009, http://blog.christianitytoday.com/ctliveblog/archives/2009/09/breaking_transl.html (accessed 1 September 2012); *Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation*, August 2010, available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/Translation-Notes-Final1.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2012).

¹³⁷"NIV to Be Revised in 2011; TNIV to Be Discontinued," Baptist Press, 1 September 2009, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.sp?id=31177> (accessed 14 September 2012).

¹³⁸Olsen, "Correcting the 'Mistakes' of TNIV and Inclusive NIV."

¹³⁹Ibid.

¹⁴⁰NIVBible2011.com.

¹⁴¹Ted Olsen, "New Testament Chair of ESV Committee Will Join NIV Team," *Christianity Today*, blog, 13 October 2009.

¹⁴²See <http://www.niv-cbt.org/translators> (accessed 1 September 2012); also see <http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv-translators.html> (accessed 1 September 2012).

Seminary

10. Mark L. Strauss (Vice Chair), 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, retired Professor, Bethel Theological Seminary, San Diego

The revised edition (NIV11) appeared online¹⁴³ 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 NIV11.¹⁴⁴ The CBT has its own website with videos featuring Doug Moo explaining the reasoning behind the NIV11 update and translation philosophy.¹⁴⁵ It has also produced a written document covering the same ground: *Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation* (NCBT).¹⁴⁶

The CBT 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 CBT, 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, ληστής), not

¹⁴³<http://www.biblegateway.com> and <http://www.biblica.com>.

¹⁴⁴http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison (accessed 1 September 2012) and <http://www.biblewebapp.com/niv2011-changes> (accessed 1 September 2012).

¹⁴⁵“Introductory Video with Doug Moo,” <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/video-featuring-dr-moo> (accessed 1 September 2012), and “Translation Webinar,” <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/translation-webinar> (accessed 1 September 2012).

¹⁴⁶Available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/niv-2011-overview/translators-note> (accessed 1 September 2012), and in pdf format, <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/Translation-Notes-Final1.pdf> (accessed 1 September 2012).

“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.”

On the issue of gender-inclusive language, the CBT 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 CBT notes that in making gender-language changes there has been a lack of accurate information as 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.¹⁴⁷ 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.”

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

1. *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***

¹⁴⁷<http://www.niv-cbt.org/information/collins-corpus-report/> (accessed 5 September 2012); <http://www.niv-cbt.org/information/collins-language-study-full-report/> (accessed 5 September 2012).

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 ē adelphē*) is followed by plural verbs and predicate adjectives and referred back to with *autois* (“them”).

2. *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.
3. *“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.”

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:

1. *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).
2. *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?”
3. *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).

4. **“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).
5. **“Ancestors” was regularly preferred to “forefathers” unless a specific, limited reference to the patriarchs or to another all-male group is intended.**
6. **“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*.
7. **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 *anthrōpos* 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 Athēnaioi* 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.

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 action of the SBC at their June 2011 meeting was a surprise. The resolutions committee, chaired by Russell Moore, Dean of the School of Theology at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, rejected a resolution submitted to it condemning the NIV11, though it had approved such a resolution for the TNIV.¹⁴⁸ However, when the resolution was brought up from the floor, it passed overwhelming.¹⁴⁹ The CBT formally responded, issuing a strong objection to the SBC resolution.¹⁵⁰ An editorial in *Christianity Today* also criticized the SBC for its decision.¹⁵¹ 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 NIV11 is a great improvement over the TNIV, but they regret they cannot recommend it.¹⁵² 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."¹⁵³ Vern Poythress issued his review of the NIV11 in the *Westminster Theological Journal*.¹⁵⁴ He concluded that although the NIV11 was an improvement over the TNIV in its reintroduction of masculine

¹⁴⁸Bob Smietana, "Gender Debate: SBC Pastors Denounce NIV," *Christianity Today*, August 2011, available only on the web at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/august/genderdebate.html> (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁴⁹Ibid. See also Tim Dalrymple, "Southern Comfort," *World*, 16 July 2011, 64. For the actual resolution, see <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1218> (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁵⁰<http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-sbc.pdf> (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁵¹September 2011, 55, available at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2011/september/bible-translation-battles.html?paging=off> (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁵²"An Evaluation of Gender Language in the 2011 Edition of the NIV Bible," 6 June 2011, available at <https://www.cbmw.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/cbmw-final-analysis-of-2011-niv.pdf> (accessed 26 October 2012). See also Denny Burk, "The Translation of Gender Terminology in the NIV 2011," *Journal of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* 16 (Spring 2011): 17–33.

¹⁵³Available at <http://www.niv-cbt.org/wp-content/uploads/cbt-response-to-cbmw-review.pdf> (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁵⁴Vern S. Poythress, "Gender Neutral Issues in the New International Version of 2011," *Westminster Theological Journal* 73 (Spring 2011): 79–96.

terms in some verses, the changes are “inconsistent and uneven.”¹⁵⁵ Mark Strauss was allowed to respond to Poythress the following year in the same journal,¹⁵⁶ followed by a surrejoinder from Poythress himself.¹⁵⁷

Since the NIV84 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 NIV11. One denomination that is facing this problem is the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod (WELS). The NIV84 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 NIV11 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.¹⁵⁸ 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 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

¹⁵⁵Ibid., 96.

¹⁵⁶“Gender-Language Issues in the NIV 2011: A Response to Vern Poythress,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 74 (Spring 2012): 119–32.

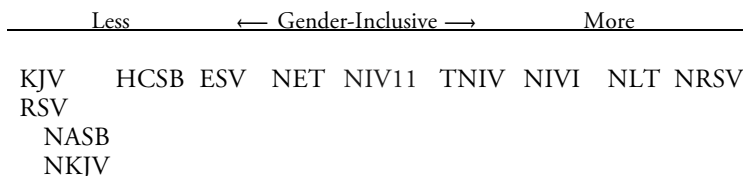
¹⁵⁷“Comments on Mark Strauss’s Response,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 74 (Spring 2012): 133–48.

¹⁵⁸Available at <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/bible-revision-new-international-version-2010> (accessed 26 October 2012).

might lead to inconsistencies, but they were not operating under any pre-conceived notion that they had to make everything perfectly consistent or uniform.¹⁵⁹

The WELS Translation Evaluation Committee has preliminarily suggested that the NIV11 should be adopted by the denomination, but are continuing to study the issue.¹⁶⁰ Interestingly, they have looked at the ESV but consider it too literal and thus not in keeping with Martin Luther's translation philosophy.¹⁶¹ However, another Lutheran denomination, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, has taken the opposite viewpoint. In a report to the denomination, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations had concluded that it is "inappropriate for NIV 2011 to be used as a lectionary Bible or as a Bible to be generally recommended to the laity of our church."¹⁶²

Perhaps it should be mentioned in closing that though the use of gender-inclusive language is commonly 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.¹⁶³



Even the ESV uses a good deal more gender-inclusive language than earlier formal equivalence translations. For example in Romans 2:6 the masculine "every man" of the RSV is changed to "each one." Similarly, in Romans 3:4 "every man" becomes "every one," and in Romans 3:28 "man" becomes "one."¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹"Supplemental Report for the 2011 WELS Convention," April 2011, available at http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/BORAM2011_supplemental_translationevaluationcommittee.pdf (accessed 26 October 2012).

¹⁶⁰Ibid.

¹⁶¹"Report to the Twelve Districts," 11 May 2012, available at http://www.wels.net/sites/wels/files/Translation_Evaluation_Committee_report.pdf (accessed 27 October 2012).

¹⁶²"CTCR Staff Opinion on Inclusive Language in the New International Version (2011)," available at <http://www.lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1935> (accessed 27 October 2012).

¹⁶³This scale is not strictly proportional, but only shows the relative positions of the various versions.

¹⁶⁴For many other examples, see Mark L. Strauss, "The Gender-Neutral Language of the *English Standard Version* (ESV)," available at <http://bible-translation.110mb.com/list/files/gender-inclusive-esv.doc> (accessed 27 October 2012). See also Decker, "The English Standard Version," 41–49. Decker reports that even Wayne Grudem in

CONCLUSION

It remains to be seen how many of those who have used the NIV84 will be comfortable with the changes in the NIV11. In most respects it is an improvement over the NIV84. The use of gender-inclusive language is clearly the issue that will continue to be the focus of most people's concern. 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.¹⁶⁵

But clearly not everyone is as sanguine as Decker. 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 to improve their opinion. It is possible that Christian laymen (or should I say, "laypersons?") who have preferred the NIV84 will make the switch effortlessly. It remains to be seen what pastors in particular will do, given the nature of the controversy.

his *Systematic Theology* prefers *people* over "man" for generic reference in that the former occurs 1,510 times but the later, 915 times ("Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version NT," 21, n. 60).

¹⁶⁵"Evaluation of the 2011 Edition of the New International Version NT," 33.