What About the “Gender Accurate” TNIV?


JOHN R. KOHLENBERGER III

“I would rather be torn in pieces by wild horses than permit any such translation to be forced upon poor churches. The new edition infuriates me. I require it to be burned.”

S
ound like the latest salvo in the current flap over the release of Today’s New International Version (TNIV)? Actually, with some archaisms updated, it is a quotation from Hugh Broughton, who in 1612 published a scathing review of the newly released Authorized or King James Version (KJV).1 Four centuries and hundreds of millions of copies later, we no longer hear such criticisms of the KJV. Ironically, we now hear such venomous language used by those who believe the KJV is the only divinely inspired Bible and that all other versions are the work of the Devil.

Such King-James-Only advocates have taken a personal preference, elevated it to a theological absolute, and used it to divide liberals from conservatives, believers from unbelievers, servants of God from minions of Satan. Critics of inclusive language in Bible translation are doing the very same thing with their reckless, blanket denunciations of the TNIV.

Earlier issues of Priscilla Papers2 have addressed well the inclusive-language controversy, which became a media frenzy in 1997. And, although most opponents of recent inclusive-language versions label these Bibles and their translators as “feminists” (using that term as a pejorative and antonym to “Bible believers”), the first books published in defense of such translations were by scholars—D. A. Carson and Mark L. Strauss—who were self-described as “traditional” or “complementarian” in their views of male-female roles in church and home.3 The only major work opposed to Carson and Strauss is also by “complementarian” authors: Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem.4 These resources deal with the controversy in detail.

Some background to the TNIV

The first inclusive-language edition of the New International Version (NIV) was published in the United Kingdom by Hodder & Stoughton in 1995 and 1996. Apparently British evangelicals were so disinterested in an inclusive-language NIV that the International Bible Society (IBS), which owns the copyright to the NIV, and the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), the scholars responsible for the maintenance and ongoing revision of the NIV, were willing to allow a preliminary revision of the NIV to be published in England, though they wanted to wait for the full revision of the NIV for the North American audience.

Following David Scholer’s celebratory review of the New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) in 1996,5 events that were precipitated from the inclusive-language controversy made it seem as though there never would be a revision of the NIV for the North American—or any other—audience. On May 27, 1997, IBS “. . . announced today that it will forgo all plans to develop a revised edition of the NIV. . . . IBS has abandoned all plans for gender-related changes in future editions of the New International Version (NIV).”6 While trying to mitigate the ferocity of the controversy and avoid censure and boycotts by such powerful groups as the Southern Baptist Convention and Focus on the Family, IBS effectively abandoned the original vision of keeping the NIV ever up-to-date and broke faith with CBT, the independent body responsible for the development and maintenance of the NIV.

But the controversy did not go away. Nor did critics of the NIVI continue to support the IBS and the unaltered NIV. In fact, the Southern Baptist Convention sponsored a new translation of the Bible through Broadman and Holman Publishers: The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), of which the NT appeared in 2000. Other critics served as advisers, reviewers, or “translators” of an evangelical revision of the Revised Standard Version (RSV), published in 2001 as the English Standard Version (ESV). Ironically, both of these versions use inclusive language more frequently than the NIV! Some of the most strident voices demeaning the TNIV are associated with these new versions—a situation many translators and publishers consider a conflict of interest.

In light of these developments, interaction with evangelical scholars supportive of a revised NIV (including the CBT), and a reassessment of the original vision for the NIV, the new leadership of IBS has taken the steps necessary to honor that original vision while honoring their commitment not to change the NIV. The results were announced on January 28, 2002: The 1984 edition of the New International Version will remain the NIV and will stay in print for as long as there is demand. The revision, though identical to
the NIV NT by more than 93 percent, bears a new name and acronym: Today’s New International Version (TNIV), which shows its relation to the “classic” NIV but also sets it apart as the offspring of the NIV that will undergo regular revision to keep in step with advances in biblical scholarship and changes in English idiom.

The official TNIV Web site (www.tniv.info) has the following explanation in “An Open Statement About the TNIV from the International Bible Society and Zondervan”:

**Clarification Regarding Colorado Springs Guidelines**

IBS, Zondervan and the Committee on Bible Translation agreed to endorse a document now referred to as the Colorado Springs Guidelines (CSG). The document contained two sections. The first, titled Statement on Gender-Related Language in Scripture, dealt with the philosophical principles associated with Bible translation. We unequivocally support the tenets set forth in this section, including:

- We agree that the overarching concern in Bible translation is to preserve the sanctity of the truth of sacred Scripture.
- We agree that the goal of all translation should be to render the most accurate translation possible.
- We agree that Bible translation should not be influenced by illegitimate intrusions of secular culture or by political or ideological agendas.
- We agree that there are limited times when the use of gender-accurate language enhances the accuracy of the translation, but overuse can become an instrument of distortion.

The second component, titled Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture, contains some very specific guidelines that those present generally agreed with or, at the time, were willing to endorse. However, upon further review and consideration, and in consultation with a broader group of evangelical scholars, IBS has determined that many of the technical guidelines are too restrictive to facilitate the most accurate possible text in contemporary English idiom.

As a result, IBS, after much prayer and consideration of their highest mission of reaching the world with accurate and clear translations of the Bible, withdrew its endorsement as a matter of integrity. The guidelines that have served the CBT for decades and those of the International Forum of Bible Agencies (IFBA) continue to guide their work. IFBA is a large body of translators including Wycliffe, Summer Institute of Linguistics and others who are responsible for 90 percent of Bible translation work.

As an outcome of that gathering in Colorado Springs, IBS and Zondervan made a commitment to continue publishing the NIV without changes or updates. Indeed, we will continue to publish the NIV without changes or updates, and we will continue to earnestly promote the NIV.

**TNIV principles of translation and revision**

The twofold goal of keeping the NIV—or any translation—up-to-date is described in “A Word to the Reader”:

There is a sense in which the work of translating the Bible is never finally finished. This very fact has prompted the Committee to engage in an ongoing review of the text of the NIV with the assistance of many other scholars. The chief goal of this review has always been to bring the text of the NIV abreast of contemporary biblical scholarship and of shifts in English idioms and usage. Already in 1978 and again in 1984 various corrections and revisions to the NIV text were made. In Today’s New International Version (TNIV) the Committee offers to the reading public the latest fruits of this review. 8

This review will summarize key changes in the TNIV resulting from “contemporary biblical scholarship” and from “shifts in English idioms and usage.

**The underlying text of the TNIV.** Like the NIV, the TNIV is “an eclectic one,” 9 informed by the latest editions of the Nestle-Aland and United Bible Societies texts.

Because most modern translations are based on Greek texts older and geographically more diverse than those used by the KJV translators, 16 verses and dozens of words and phrases in the KJV are not in these modern translations because they are not in the most ancient Greek texts. Most modern versions, the NIV included, translate these verses and many phrases in footnotes, acknowledging their significance in the history of the English Bible, while rejecting them as original to the Greek NT.


More dramatic is the treatment of the so-called “Longer Ending” of Mark 16:9–21 and the story of the adulteress in John 7:53–8:11. These passages were marked off in the NIV with horizontal ruling lines and subheads that noted the verses were not in the “earliest manuscripts and some other ancient versions.” In the TNIV the ruling lines and subheads remain, but the text is now italicized and reduced in size. 10 A few other text-critical changes of interest include Matthew 27:16–17; Mark 1:1; 2 Corinthians 1:12; and 1 Thessalonians 2:7.

**Word pattern changes (other than inclusive language).** Several words and phrases have undergone pattern changes throughout the TNIV as a result both of advances in scholarship and changes in English idiom. These changes sometimes improve clarity, avoid misunderstanding, and sharpen the historical context.

“Christ” to “Messiah.” A frequent and notable change mentioned in the TNIV preface involves the Greek word christos, “… where the term is clearly used to designate the God-sent deliverer of Jewish expectation (primarily in the Gospels and Acts), it was judged more appropriate to use “Messiah.” However, where this sense seems less prominent (primarily the Epistles), the transliteration of the Greek word (Christ) has been retained.” 11

The TNIV has Messiah 68 times where the NIV has it only twice (John 1:41; 4:25); conversely, the TNIV has Christ 468 times where the NIV has it 530 times. Here is one example:

Mark 8:29


TNIV: “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Peter answered. “You are the Messiah.”

4 PRISCILLA PAPERS/Spring 2002: 16:2
Another pattern of change seeks to avoid the familiar word “saints” in light of its usage in Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions to indicate a special class of believer.12 Some passages that might have been easily misinterpreted include Acts 9:32; 1 Corinthians 6:2; and Revelation 5:8. The NIV has saints 45 times, while in the TNIV saints remains only 9 times (Rom. 1:7; 15:26; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:2; Rev. 8:4; 18:20).

“Jews” to “Jewish leaders.” The plural form of the Greek word ioudaioi is usually translated “Jews” in the NIV and TNIV. However, in eighteen contexts in John and Acts, it is clear that “the Jews” refers to a subgroup within the Jewish people that is antagonistic to Jesus and his followers. In these contexts the TNIV translates ioudaioi contextually as “Jewish leaders” (John 1:19; 5:10, 15, 16; 7:1, 11; 9:22; 18:14, 28, 36; 19:12, 31, 38; 20:19; Acts 13:50; 21:11; 25:2; 28:17). Since Jesus and his early followers were all Jews, this translation makes it clearer that one subgroup within the Jewish people was antagonistic to another subgroup within the Jewish people. Take, for example, the case of Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Council—both a “Jew” and a “Jewish leader”:

John 19:38
NIV: Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jews.
TNIV: Now Joseph was a disciple of Jesus, but secretly because he feared the Jewish leaders.

Spirit-emphasizing renderings of “pneumatikos.” In the NIV the Greek adjective pneumatikos is always rendered “spiritual” or “spiritually.” In light of recent research, especially by Gordon Fee, this adjective is rendered in ways that more clearly emphasize that what is described by pneumatikos is of the Holy Spirit. For example:

1 Corinthians 2:15
NIV: The spiritual man makes judgments about all things, but he himself is not subject to any man’s judgment;
TNIV: The person with the Spirit makes judgments about all things, but such a person is not subject to merely human judgments.

Other significant passages include 1 Corinthians 2:13; 12:1; Galatians 6:1; and Ephesians 5:19.

Word pattern changes involving inclusive language.
The revisions that have made the headlines since January are, however, those that involve gender-oriented language. Although the NIV in 1997 and the TNIV in 2002 have been singled out in the inclusive-language controversy, the reality is that these versions are just two of at least twenty revisions and new translations that have appeared since 1985 and—with the exception of the 1995 revision of the NASB—all of these versions have used inclusive language far more frequently than the NIV! These include the de-facto standard in the academic world, the NRSV (1989); the most-used Roman Catholic translations, the New American Bible (NAB, 1986, 1991) and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB, 1985, 1990); and the best-selling simple-English version, the New Living Translation (NLT, 1996). I can only surmise that the TNIV is receiving the most criticism because it is the largest target and many of its critics have their own recent translations.

The main points of contention involve masculine nouns—man, brother, father, son—and third-person masculine singular pronouns—he him, his—all of which have traditionally been used in an inclusive sense. For decades studies have shown that these so-called masculine inclusive terms are heard as exclusively masculine terms by the majority of test subjects.13 So it would seem most desirable—especially to communicate to seekers and young people—to avoid masculine terminology when the biblical text is clearly inclusive.

This is what William Tyndale must have thought when in 1526 he translated Matthew 5:9 as “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” Some manuscripts of the Wycliffe version of 1390 even have “children” in this text instead of “sons,” the masculine translation of the masculine Greek word huioi. In fact, all of the sixteenth-century English translations of the NT followed Wycliffe and Tyndale, culminating in the KJV of 1611. It wasn’t until the late nineteenth century with the English Revised Version (ERV, 1881, 1885) and the American Standard Version (ASV, 1901) that peacemakers became “sons of God.” These literalistic translations abandoned much of the ad sensum inclusive language of Tyndale and the KJV in favor of a more formal-equivalent translation style and a more limited list of English glosses. The RV and ASV strongly influenced the styles of the midtwentieth-century translations that many of us grew up with: the RSV, NASB, NIV, and NKJV, all of which use inclusive language less frequently than Tyndale and the KJV.

The so-called Colorado Springs Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture were assembled in 1997 as an attempt to promote “masculine inclusive” language as the only accurate way to translate the Bible. The guidelines are well critiqued by Strauss, Carson,14 Spencer15 and Leigh. Suffice it to say that the guidelines represent a preference for “masculine-inclusive” language and formal-equivalent translation style but do not represent the range of language that has characterized the history of English Bible translation. No translation yet—including the ESV and HCSB—follows the guidelines consistently, so why should their proponents criticize any translation that departs from the guidelines?

Only two guidelines are needed for the accurate rendering of gender-oriented language in Bible translation:

1. When the biblical text is clearly gender inclusive, translate it with English that is clearly gender inclusive.
2. When the biblical text is clearly gender specific, translate it with English that is clearly gender specific.

The TNIV Web site offers the following explanation of CBT’s dealing with gender-oriented language:

Updates include:
• 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.

“Man/men” to “people,” “human beings,” and so on. Every Greek-English lexicon and theological dictionary published in the twentieth century agrees that the Greek words anthropos and aner can mean “any human being” as well as “male”; only the context can determine whether these words should be glossed as “man” or “husband,” “person” or “people.” The sources agree that the only Greek word that always means “male” is arsen, a word not addressed in the Colorado Springs Guidelines, and always translated “male” or “men” in the NIV and TNIV.

One massive improvement in the TNIV, and in many other modern versions, is the rephrasing of passages dealing with salvation to clearly include women and not just men. In the following extracts from 1 Timothy 2, the words in bold type are highlighted to assist comparison (there is no bold type in the translations as published):

KJV: 2:1 I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men;
RSV: 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all men,
NASB: 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men,
NIV: 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that supplications, petitions, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone—
NRSV: 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,
NJB: 2:1 I urge then, first of all that petitions, prayers, intercessions and thanksgiving should be offered for everyone,
NAB: 2:1 First of all, then, I ask that supplications, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be offered for everyone,
NLT: 2:1 I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people. As you make your requests, plead for God’s mercy upon them, and give thanks.
HCSB: 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,
ESV: 2:1 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone,
TNIV: 2:1 I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—

The gender language in 1 Timothy 2:1 in the TNIV is identical to the NIV, since the NIV was already clearly inclusive, as are the NRSV, NJB, NAB, NLT, NJSB, and ESV in contrast to the KJV, RSV, and NASB.

KJV: 2:4 Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.
RSV: 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
NASB: 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
NIV: 2:4 who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
NRSV: 2:4 who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
NJB: 2:4 who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
NAB: 2:4 who wills everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth.
NLT: 2:4 for he wants everyone to be saved and to understand the truth.
HCSB: 2:4 who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.
ESV: 2:4 who desires all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.
TNIV: 2:4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

In 2:4, the TNIV improves on the NIV’s “masculine inclusive,” in agreement with the same seven recent versions.

KJV: 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;
RSV: 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
NASB: 2:5 For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
NIV: 2:5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,
NRSV: 2:5 For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and mankind, Christ Jesus, himself human,
NJB: 2:5 For there is only one God, and there is only one mediator between God and humanity, himself a human being, Christ Jesus,
NAB: 2:5 For there is one God. There is also one mediator between God and the human race, Christ Jesus, himself human,
NLT: 2:5 For there is only one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and people. He is the man Christ Jesus.
HCSB: 2:5 For there is one God / and one mediator between God and man, / a man, Christ Jesus,
ESV: 2:5 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

In 2:5, the TNIV improves on the NIV’s “masculine inclusive,” in agreement with five recent versions. For some reason, the HCSB and the ESV use unnecessary masculine terminology here, though the Greek words are the same as in verses 1 and 4 (anthropos). It is clear that Jesus’ humanity—not his gender—is in view here, but these unfortunate renderings will surely be misheard by many as asserting reconciliation with God is mediated by males.

KJV: 2:6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.
RSV: 2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time.
NASB: 2:6 who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.
NIV: 2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time.
NRSV: 2:6 who gave himself a ransom for all—this was attested at the right time.
NJB: 2:6 who offered himself as a ransom for **all**. This was the witness given at the appointed time, 
NAB: 2:6 who gave himself as ransom for **all**. This was the 
NLT: 2:6 He gave his life to purchase freedom for **everyone**. 
This is the message that God gave to the world at the prop-
erness. 
HCGB: 2:6 who gave Himself—a ransom for **all**, / the tes-
momy at the proper time. 
ESV: 2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for **all**, which is the 
testimony given at the proper time. 
TNIV: 2:6 who gave himself as a ransom for **all people**. 
This has now been witnessed to at the proper time.

In 2:6, the **TNIV**—and all the versions cited—improve upon the **NIV**’s unnecessary use of “men” in translating the Greek word **pas** (“all”). If we were to read on in 1 Timothy 2:7, we would note that the **TNIV** and all other translations render this gender-specific verse as instructions to “men” and also render the gender-specific instructions to and comments about “women” in 2:9–15. This is true in all gen-
der-oriented changes in the **TNIV**: when the context is gen-
der inclusive, the English is gender inclusive; when the context is gender specific, the English is gender specific. Such language is increasingly referred to as “gender accu-
rate”; the English clearly matches the context and intent of the original. 

Brothers” to “brothers and sisters,” “believers,” **and so on**. As in the cases of **anthropos** and **aner**, all 
the Greek-English lexicons and theological dic-
tionaries agree that **adelphos** can mean a literal 
biological “brother” as well as a member of a 
class or group of either gender. Although the 
sources do not all specify the inclusiveness of 
**adelphos** in the singular, they are all clear about 
the plural. Note especially the comments in The 
**Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament**, clearly 
not written by “feminists”: “In translating it 
should be carefully noted that **adelphoi** (pl.) can 
also mean ‘sibling,’ that is, ‘brothers and sis-
ters.’”19 In keeping with this nearly universally acknow-
edged semantic domain, the **TNIV** regularly renders **adelphos** 
(singular) as “brother or sister” or “believer” and **adelphoi** 
as “brothers and sisters” or “believers.”

**2 Thessalonians 3:6** 
NIV: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command 
you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle 
and does not live according to the teaching you received 
from us. 
TNIV: In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command 
you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer 
who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to 
the teaching you received from us.

Note that the same translation technique had already been 
used on occasion in the **NIV** in its first edition, 1973: 

**Acts 1:15** 
NIV: In those days Peter stood up among the believers* (a 
group numbering about a hundred and twenty) 
*In (1984 edition): 15 Greek brothers 
TNIV: In those days Peter stood up among the believers (a 
group numbering about a hundred and twenty)

Language is referred to as “gender accurate” when the 
English clearly matches the context and intent of the original.

**“Fathers” to “parents,” “ancestors,” and so on. Again, the 
sources agree that the Greek word **pater** can mean a biological 
**male parent, “father,” as well as referring inclusively to 
parents and ancestors. Even the **ASV, NASB, RSV, NIV, HCSB,** 
and **ESV** agree with the **KJV**’s inclusive rendering of Hebrews 11:23, recognizing that Moses was not hidden by 
his “fathers”:

KJV: By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three 
months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper 
child; and they were not afraid of the king’s commandment. 

The **TNIV** follows this same principle, rendering **pater** 
with clearly inclusive terminology when the context is clearly inclusive: 

**2 Peter 3:4** 
NIV: They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? 
Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has 
since the beginning of creation.” 
TNIV: They will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised? 
Ever since our ancestors died, everything goes on as it has 
since the beginning of creation.”

In some contexts where inclusiveness is not as certain, the **TNIV** offers an inclusive rendering in a footnote: 

**Ephesians 6:4** 
TNIV: Fathers,* do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruc-
tion of the Lord. 
*fn: 4 Or Parents

It should be noted that in keeping with their commitment to preserving masculine terms in 
God-oriented language, God is always “Father”—not “Parent” or “Mother-Father”—in the 
**TNIV**.

**“Son” and “sons” to “child” and “children.” The rendering of the Greek word **hios** as “child” in the singular and “children” in the plural is common in Tyndale and the **KJV**, though it fell out of style in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth cen-
turies. The **TNIV** follows the consensus of modern Greek-
English resources in returning to the **ad sensum** renderings 
of the sixteenth century:

**Matthew 5:9** 
NIV: Blessed are the peacemakers, 
for they will be called sons of God. 
TNIV: Blessed are the peacemakers, 
for they will be called children of God.

In some inclusive contexts, the **TNIV** has retained “son-
ship” language with a new footnote about the cultural sig-
ificance of the term:

**Romans 8:15** 
NIV: For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave 
again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by 
him we cry, “Abba, Father.” 
*fn: 15 Or adoption 
TNIV: The Spirit you received does not make you slaves, so 
that you live in fear again; rather, the Spirit you received 
brought about your adoption to sonship.* And by him we 
cry, “Abba, Father.” 
*fn: 15 The Greek word for **adoption to sonship** is a term referring to the full legal standing of an adopted male 
heir in Roman culture.
Interestingly, even in this “sonship” context, Paul goes on in verse 16 to speak of believers as “children” (tekna)—not “sons” (huioi)—of God.

Again, in keeping with their policy concerning God-oriented language, Jesus is always the “Son,” unless the Greek uses the neuter term paidion (“child”), such as in Matthew 2:8, 9, 11, 13, 14, 20, 21; Luke 2:40; and so on.

Third-person singular to third-person plural or second person. Some recent translations render the single words mentioned above with inclusive terms in inclusive contexts, yet prefer to stay more formally equivalent in rendering the third-person masculine singular with grammatically identical English terms: he, his, him. It should be noted that most passages that use the third-person singular in a generic or inclusive sense are proverbial or “gnomic” sayings. In such cases, the meaning is not dependent on number or person: the saying includes anyone who hears and all who hear.

Therefore a meaning-oriented translation (often called “dynamic equivalent” or “functional equivalent”) can justifiably change the form of the original to communicate the meaning of the original.

In Jesus’ conversation with Nicodemus, he twice speaks of the New Birth in the third-person singular. Though differently worded than the NIV, the TNIV preserves the form of the original without masculine nouns or pronouns:

**John 3:3**

NIV: In reply Jesus declared, “I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”

TNIV: Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born again.”

**John 3:5**

NIV: Jesus answered, ‘I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit.’

TNIV: Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the Spirit.”

Remarkably, when Jesus quotes these third-person singular statements in John 3:7, he quotes himself in the second-person plural, a fact noted in both the NIV and TNIV.

**John 3:7**

NIV: You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You* must be born again.’

TNIV: You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You* must be born again.’

*fn: 7 The Greek is plural.

As stated in its preface:

While a basic core of the English language remains relatively stable, many diverse and complex cultural forces continue to bring about subtle shifts in the meanings and/or connotations of even old, well-established words and phrases. Among the more programmatic changes in the TNIV is the removal of nearly all vocative “O’s” and the elimination of most instances of the generic use of masculine nouns and pronouns. Relative to the second of these, the so-called singular “they/their/them,” which has been gaining acceptance among careful writers and which actually has a venerable place in English idiom, has been employed to fill in the vocabulary gap in generic nouns and pronouns referring to human beings. Where an individual emphasis is deemed to be present, “anyone” or “everyone” is generally used as the antecedent of such pronouns.

**Matthew 6:27** (third person masculine singular to second person)

NIV: Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?

TNIV: Can any of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?

**Matthew 11:15** (third person masculine singular to indefinite singular followed by third person plural)

NIV: He who has ears, let him hear.

TNIV: Whoever has ears, let them hear.

**Significant passages involving women. Romans 16.** English translations, following centuries of traditional interpretation, have been slow to recognize the names and titles of women in key texts. The TNIV follows many other translations and commentaries in remedying some of these situations. Notable in Romans 16 are the cases of Phoebe—now a “deacon” and a “benefactor”—and Junia—now a woman (not “Junias”) and an “apostle”:

**Romans 16:1-2**

NIV: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant* of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.

*fn: 1 Or deaconess

TNIV: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon* of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of God’s people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.

*fn: 1 Or servant

**Romans 16:7**

NIV: Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

TNIV: Greet Andronicus and Junia, my fellow Jews who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was.

**1 Timothy 2–3.** The TNIV translates the difficult vocabulary in 1 Timothy 2:12 exactly as does the NIV; however, additional footnotes identify other interpretive options:

NIV: I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent.

TNIV: I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be quiet.

*fn: 1 Or to exercise authority over; or to dominate

**Romans 16:11 Or her husband**

In dealing with the leadership qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:1-11, the TNIV switches text and note with the NIV:

NIV: In the same way, their wives* are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

*fn: 11 Or way, deaconesses

TNIV: In the same way, women [who are deacons]* are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything.

*fn: 11 Or way, [deacons’] wives

The use of half-brackets around “who are deacons” follows the NIV and TNIV practice of marking uncertain renderings: “To achieve clarity the translators sometimes supplied words not in the original texts but required by the...
context. If there was uncertainty about such material, it is enclosed in brackets."  

Roles in church and home. The key texts dealing with male and female “roles” and “offices” in home and church are not matters of translation; but of interpretation. Egalitarians do not generally contest the use of words such as head and submit; they do contest how the terms are defined and worked out by many traditionalists who promote male superiority and leadership over mutual submission.

It is not surprising then that “man” is still “head of the woman” in 1 Corinthians 11:3 and that “the husband is the head of the wife” in Ephesians 5:23. Wives still submit to their own husbands in Ephesians 5:22, 24; Colossians 3:18; and 1 Peter 3:1. The qualifications for the “overseer” (footnote “bishop”) are still stated in masculine terms in 1 Timothy 2:1–7, as are those for the “elder” and “overseer” in Titus 1:6–9. These passages make it clear that the TNIV is not promoting an egalitarian or “feminist” agenda, as so many critics carelessly allege.

Conclusions

What is promoted in the gender-oriented language of the TNIV is what “complementarians” claim they have in common with egalitarians: that women and men are equal in standing before God and are fully included in the community. Male and female roles are not changed in the TNIV, only the language of community. Women are no longer hidden in such masculine terms as “men,” “fathers,” “sons,” and “brothers”; they are now fully included in terms such as “people,” “parents,” “children,” and “brothers and sisters.” How can there be any real objection to such language, most of which has been with us for six hundred years of English Bible tradition?

The King James translators gave us what is undoubtedly the finest introduction to an English version in their “Translators to the Reader.” Though this invaluable document is no longer printed in most editions of the KJV, it is available in facsimile and in modern paraphrase from the American Bible Society.  

In speaking of the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures most often quoted in the NT, they note:

It is certain, that that translation was not so sound and so perfect, but that it needed in many places correction; and who had been so sufficient for this work as the apostles or apostolic men? Yet it seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to them to take that which they found (the same being for the greatest part true and sufficient) . . .

What the KJV translators believed of the flawed Greek Septuagint, I believe of our many flawed English translations: they are “for the greatest part true and sufficient.” I urge critics of the TNIV and other recent translations to adopt this same attitude. If you don’t like the TNIV, don’t use it—use the translation you prefer. But don’t condemn the TNIV as heretical; acknowledge it as “true and sufficient,” even if it doesn’t render all verses with your preferred vocabulary.

Far from considering the TNIV merely “true and sufficient,” I feel it is the best NT translation we have—an excellent combination of accuracy and readability in a much more contemporary idiom than its excellent forebear, the NIV. Since it is at least 93 percent identical to the NIV, the TNIV can be used in any church or educational context where the NIV is the current standard. Most verses will be identical and those which are different are all improvements, whether from the perspective of biblical scholarship or of English idiom. As CBT and CBT are committed to completing the TNIV by 2005, Zondervan is committed to adapting its most significant Study Bible formats and reference books to serve the TNIV as they have the NIV.

Please consult the TNIV Web site at www.tniv.info for further information and to read the TNIV on line. And be sure to send an e-mail to thank the leadership of CBT and the hard-working scholars of CBT for the long and difficult path they have traveled to bring this new treasure to the church of the twenty-first century.

Notes

2. PRISCILLA PAPERS, Volume 10, Number 4, pp. 1-2; Volume 11, Number 4, the entire issue.
5. PRISCILLA PAPERS, Volume 10, Number 4, 1-2.
6. Ibid., 1.
9. Ibid., vi.
10. Ibid., vii.
11. Ibid., vi.
12. Ibid., viii.
14. Ibid., throughout.
15. Ibid., 111–33.
16. PRISCILLA PAPERS, Volume 11, Number 4, 18–19.
17. PRISCILLA PAPERS, Volume 11, Number 4, 20–25.
20. Ibid., vii.
23. Ibid, 35.