

THE INCLUSIVE NIV SITUATION

REFLECTIONS A YEAR LATER

David M. Scholer

A year ago in this journal I wrote: "We should be thankful for the NIV Inclusive Language Edition.... This translation is... a blessing for and a gift to the Church and its ministry.... We should also pray and lend our support for the appearance and ready availability of this edition of the NIV in the U.S. as soon as possible."¹

I am still thankful—more thankful than I knew—both for the work of the NIV Committee on Translation and for the publication of the NIV Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) by Hodder & Stoughton in the U.K. The NIVI remains a gift to the Church.

I was so pleased to receive a letter in January 1997, in direct response to my *Priscilla Papers* article, from Lars B. Dunberg, President of the International Bible Society [IBS], which holds the copyright for the NIV and the NIVI. Lars Dunberg said in his letter: "Zondervan and IBS will publish an inclusive version of the NIV in the American market." He went on to say that it was still being debated when to publish this version, but that it would be by the year 2000.² This was indeed good news.

The good news did not last. The tragic story of disappointing events that led to the May 27, 1997 news release from the International Bible Society, which reversed Lars Dunberg's promise and cancelled the planned U.S. publication of the work of the Committee on Bible Translation, is relatively well-known. The IBS, the release stated, "...announced today that it will forego 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)." Although not all the events can be detailed here, it should be noted that the

magazine *World*, beginning with its March 29, 1997 issue, which called the NIVI "the Stealth Bible," led a critique of this translation, calling it "gender neutral." Eventually, there was a meeting of various persons and groups at Focus on the Family headquarters in Colorado Springs, Colorado. This included leaders from *World* magazine, Focus on the Family, and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, among others. This group, made up of persons who, with virtual unanimity, oppose the equal partnership of men and women in all activities and offices of the ministries of the Church and the Gospel, adopted guidelines for the translation of gender-related language in the Bible. It was the pressure generated by *World* and this coalition, largely related to Focus on the Family and the Council of Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and their supporters, that pushed Lars Dunberg and the IBS to reverse its own work, plans and promises.³

The discussions and publications of articles, letters and memoranda since May 27 have been legion. Wherever I travel in evangelical circles, this is an issue people want to discuss. For me, for Christians for Biblical Equality, for *Priscilla Papers*, and for countless other evangelical persons and groups with whom I speak and correspond, the "death" of the NIVI and the efforts and events that led to that "death" are a travesty. According to *Christianity Today*, my first article on this matter in *Priscilla Papers* a year ago is what prompted *World* magazine to begin the "campaign" that led to this action.⁴ It is a "credit" neither *Priscilla Papers* nor I cherish; we wanted to celebrate the NIVI and never dreamed—never envisioned the nightmare—of what did eventually happen.

But the many evangelicals who desire a contemporary, powerful and inclusive-language NIV should abandon neither their hope nor their prayers. It is difficult to believe that the greatness of the NIV will be lost and buried by the refusal to continue to do *precisely what the NIV set out to do in the first place in 1978*—produce a genuinely faithful English translation in contemporary, readable and usable English!

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As I reflect on what has happened during this year, I would like to offer eight observations, which I trust will contribute even in some small way to the reversal of the unfortunate action of the IBS.

1. THE NATURE OF TRANSLATION

All translation is done with the recognition that lexical and grammatical realities do not necessarily translate one-for-one. That is why completely literal “translations” are not really translations at all. Further, all translation from one language to another involves various degrees of interpretation. Finally, language changes over time; therefore, in the course of time, new translations are required in the “same” language. Thus, in English translations, for example, it was wise and necessary to move from Wycliffe (14th century) to Tyndale (16th century), to the King James Version (17th century), to the American Standard Version and the many other fine twentieth century English translations of the Bible.

It is in this context of the nature of translation that inclusive language issues should be understood. When, for example, the Apostle Paul addressed believers in one of his churches as *adelphoi* (literally, “brothers”), both male and female believers were meant to be included. How to represent that reality in a late twentieth-century English translation is, to be sure, a discussable issue, but it is hardly a matter of wooden or naive literalism. A decision to translate *adelphoi* as “brothers and sisters” is a faithful translation decision—faithful both to the original language and its historical-social context and to contemporary English.⁵

2. THE HISTORICAL NATURE OF THE NIV

The character of the NIV from the beginning was an attempt to combine accuracy and faithfulness to the original languages with idiomatic and contemporary English. Perhaps something of this could be illustrated by what I assume to be a text that creates no special controversies. In Galatians 5:2, Paul wants to make a forceful statement about his argument against the practice of circumcision. It is introduced with the term *ide* (literally, “behold”; so the KJV). The New Revised Standard Version translates this term “Listen!” But, the NIV, more graphically and expansively than other major translations, renders it “Mark my words!”

The methodological commitments and the actual translation practices that produced the original 1978 NIV were what is often called “dynamic equivalence” translation. This is the attempt to state the original biblical expression *both* faithfully *and* in powerful, understandable contemporary English; in such an approach a literal

translation may work, but has no privileged place. Another hallmark of the NIV is its use of contemporary English sentence structure; it does not necessarily adhere to the Hebrew or Greek sentence structures. I believe that these are major reasons why the NIV has been recognized as such an excellent translation and why it has become so broadly loved by so many Christian readers of the Bible.⁶

It should not be at all surprising, then, that it was the International Bible Society’s own NIV Committee on Translation that produced the Inclusive Language Edition of the NIV. The 1978 Preface to the NIV had acknowledged that the work of translation is never done. This is because the quest for accuracy is always a matter of interpretation and because the translation (or receptor) language changes. The transition to inclusive language, as well as other changes that were believed to be better and/or more accurate renderings, were natural outcomes of the very history, philosophy, commitments and genius of the NIV and its very own “gatekeepers,” the Committee on Translation.

3. THE MOTIVATIONS FOR MOVING TO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

The charge has often been made in this past year that the NIVI was motivated by and a capitulation to a secular, sometimes radical and “anti-Christian” feminist movement that began just prior to the mid-1960s in the U.S. This charge is absurd and would be almost laughable, were it not for the persistence and vehemence with which it is made. The charge is usually made within the rhetorical context of proclaiming faithful adherence to biblical authority (perceived as over against the so-called pernicious influences of modern feminism).

It strikes me as ludicrous to think of the IBS NIV Committee on Translation (as a group, primarily conservative evangelical men) as being covert “secular feminists” or as persons who “sold out” to such a perspective, either consciously or unconsciously.

No, the Committee on Bible Translation was motivated by the interpretive and translational struggle inherent in the transition from a faithful understanding of biblical texts *in their own contexts* to the actual and changing character of late twentieth century American (and other forms of) English.⁷ Thus, translations such as “brother and sister” (previously “brother” in the NIV), the use of “person” (previously “man”) and the use of plurals for singulars (e.g., 1 Cor 11:28) and second person for third person pronouns (e.g., 2 Cor 9:7) are *not* capitulations to any secular agenda; rather *they are attempts to provide faithful, accurate translations that respect both the authority and historical reality of the biblical texts and the need to communicate in meaningful, contemporary English.* These are the standard commitments of good

translation philosophy in the “dynamic equivalent” tradition and are completely consistent with the history of the NIV and its Committee on Translation.

4. THE IMPORTANT DIFFERENCE BETWEEN “GENDER NEUTRAL” AND “INCLUSIVE” LANGUAGE

The opponents of the NIVI are quite persistent, irresponsibly so, in labeling the language of this NIV edition as “gender neutral.” Such labeling allows them to charge that this language change leads inevitably to the elimination of gender (by which is meant elimination of distinct male and female sexual identity). This perverse interpretation then allows them to understand the language shift as catering to a “secular feminist agenda.”

The identification of these English language changes in the NIVI as “gender neutral” is unfair, irresponsible, even bordering on a “cheap shot” or outright distortion. In fact, the language of “brother and sister” or the use of “they” or “you” (to avoid exclusive uses of “he” and “him”) is *explicitly* designed to include *both* male *and* female, which is the very opposite of neutralizing gender or sexual identity! The use of *inclusive* language is the attempt to render in contemporary English the historical reality of both men and women as the explicit and intended referents in various biblical texts.

Simply put, the title of the revised NIV is explicitly accurate: Inclusive Language Edition. The attempt to identify this enterprise as an example of “gender neutral” language is dishonest and becomes a means of subverting the whole debate, and confuses the understanding of good Christian people. Sadly, these tactics are being employed by evangelical scholars who ought to know better.

5. THE DEEPER AND ACTUAL ISSUE BEHIND THE NIV LANGUAGE DEBATE

My comments here constitute my own hypothesis, but the circumstantial evidence of the last year—and a much longer acquaintance with many of the persons involved—points strongly in one direction. It is not accidental that virtually all of those who have led the “charge” against the NIVI are persons who are known for their opposition to the *full* participation of women in all forms of church ministry (generally this involves excluding women from ordination, from certain offices [e.g., elder] and from authoritative teaching of men).

Although I think those who oppose the use of inclusive language in Bible translations have serious intellectual and theological commitments that undergird this opposition, the issue which provides the enormous energy, relentless zeal and political pressure of their “movement” is far deeper. It is rooted in a common understanding of the Bible and

the world that, for all its affirmations of the spiritual equality of men and women, does—in fact—exclude women, just because they *are* women, from full participation in the Church and all of its ministries. Their opposition reflects what I (not they) see as an actual fear of sexual equality.

I am reminded of a statement made by John Woodhouse of Moore Theological College in Sydney, Australia, in a debate we had in 1985. John Woodhouse (not a participant in the current NIV debate to my knowledge) said: “Dr. Scholer, if you are correct [referring to equal participation of men and women in ministry] in twenty years the world will have returned to barbarism.”⁸ Perhaps no one in the current movement that put to death the NIVI would want to claim directly John Woodhouse’s statement, but his remark illustrates clearly what I perceive, hear and feel constantly from those who oppose and speak out against the NIV Inclusive Language Edition. I think such fear is rooted in the perceived personal threat for some men of sharing power with women as colleagues.

6. THE ALLEGED ISSUE OF TRUST

To me, one of the more disturbing aspects of the travesty of the “death” of the revised NIV is the oft-made charge that one cannot trust this version (or other inclusive language Bible translations, such as the New Living Translation, the New Revised Standard Version or the Contemporary English Version).

A strong example of this misguided trust issue is found in the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood’s two-page advertisement in the October 27, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today* (pp. 14-15). The largest print in the ad runs across the top of the two pages and says: “Can I Still Trust My Bible?” The opening text of the ad continues: “In recent controversies over so-called ‘gender-neutral’ [that unfair term again] Bibles, Christians have begun to wonder which Bibles they can trust to translate gender-related language accurately.” Later the ad reads: “If you want to know what Bible translations you can trust....” This is followed by advising people to ask their Christian bookstores and pastors, and then gives a (partial) list of translations one can purportedly trust (NIV, NASB, RSV, KJV, NKJV).

Part of what is disturbing in this ad is the blurring of specific trust on issues of gender-related language and the use of general trust language about the Bible. This blurring feeds off the fear mentioned in the previous section. It raises questions that Christians had not previously found disturbing—until someone insinuated that Bibles using inclusive language should not be trusted. Plant the seed of doubt leading to the specter of an “untrustworthy Bible”, and it is not difficult to arouse fear and opposition in many Christian circles.

The trust issue is an unfair and dishonest one. The major inclusive-language Bibles previously mentioned can certainly be trusted as genuine and useful attempts to render faithfully and powerfully the written Word of God into readable and usable contemporary English. To suggest (it is never said directly) that such Bibles are untrustworthy is a form of name-calling and “guilt by association.” This tactic breeds unwarranted suspicion and distrust, and erodes confidence in the wholesome character of most English Bible translations and their ministries to the Church and the broader public. Recalling what was said in the first section on the nature of translation, it should be recognized that contemporary English translations which adopt inclusive language are seeking to address a genuine issue of communication and faithful interpretation. Using inclusive language to recognize both men and women in biblical texts, and certainly in the NIV Inclusive Language Edition, in no way threatens any commitment to the infallibility and authority of the Bible.

7. MISLEADING ANALOGIES AND FALSE ALLEGATIONS AGAINST INCLUSIVE-LANGUAGE BIBLES

I find the last paragraph of Wayne Grudem’s article in the October 27, 1997 Christianity Today especially disturbing.⁹ He notes that “the words of Scripture are not ours to tamper with as we please,” which is certainly an unwarranted insinuation against inclusive-language Bibles. But, he then likens the inclusive-language translations to two well-known historical examples of biblical distortion: the second-century “heretic” Marcion and the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ own translation of the Bible.

These comparisons are so unfair and insidious that I hardly know what to say. It is historically and theologically inaccurate and misleading to a very significant degree to liken contemporary inclusive-language Bible translations to the massive distortions of Marcion (who rejected the Old Testament, some of the Gospels and even parts of Paul) and also to the clearly theologically-influenced translations in the Jehovah’s Witnesses’ version of the Bible. These comparisons are simply irresponsible—and they come from a learned seminary professor and leader in various evangelical organizations.

It is perhaps in this context that I could comment on the (mis)use of my Priscilla Papers article of a year ago on the Web site for the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (of which Wayne Grudem is President).¹⁰ First, the two pages of the article appear, but approximately one-half of the article is blocked out, so that it cannot be read. This borders on a type of misrepresentation and control. Second, at one point the CBMW Web page “editor” has added a side-bar which reads: “Note Scholer’s description of the NIV Committee on Translation’s work

on the Inclusive Language Edition as ‘daring’ or ‘avant garde’.” This takes my words out of context. What I said was that for evangelicals who have not engaged the issue of nonsexist inclusive language, “one might even call” the inclusive NIV daring or avant garde. It is, of course, a small point. But the misrepresentation is, I fear, part of a pattern among those who oppose the inclusive edition of the NIV.

8. MY FINAL APPEAL AND THE FUTURE OF THE NIV

First, I am concerned about the NIV and its future life and use in the Church. It is not the only choice we have; I currently use the New Revised Standard Version as my public teaching and preaching English Bible. But the NIV is an excellent translation; it deserves a long life throughout the entire Church. The “shelving” of the inclusive language edition of the NIV by the IBS is a tragedy and a great loss.

It is quite peculiar and puzzling, further, that the energies of World magazine, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and Focus on the Family were directed so particularly at the inclusive language NIV. Although persons such as Wayne Grudem are now noting other translations, nevertheless major publications such as the New Revised Standard Version, the Contemporary English Version and the New Living Translation—all committed to the use of inclusive language—have enjoyed relative immunity from the type of intense criticism directed at the NIV.

I hope and pray that the IBS will return to its original commitment (i.e., the work *already done by its own Committee on Translation*) and go forward with a new version of the NIV for the U.S. that includes the inclusive language changes already in place and whatever other changes the Committee on Translation deems wise. (In my earlier article I pointed out that one such correction had already been made: the use of Junia [a female name] in Romans 16:7). Persons like myself and journals like Priscilla Papers are not going to attempt to call a “summit” meeting in Colorado Springs or elsewhere. We appeal, however, to all those within various evangelical communities and traditions who support an inclusive-language NIV to make their calm voices of care and support known to the IBS (and to Zondervan Publishing House, the publisher of the NIV).

Second, the Church, entrusted with the powerful Gospel of Jesus Christ in whom “there is not male and female” (Gal 3:28), simply cannot afford to spend its precious resources on a misguided, ill-informed and divisive debate about a relatively small feature of faithful, late twentieth-century English translations of the Bible. The Church has far more important and difficult tasks that require the best minds, energies and commitments it has to offer to God and the world God loves.

IN BRIEF

Jeffrey Drew Prey

- 1 David M. Scholer, "New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition: An Important but Mysterious Event," Priscilla Papers 10:4 (Fall 1996), 1-2.
- 2 The full text of the letter was published, with Lars Dunberg's explicit permission, in Priscilla Papers 11:1 (Winter 1997), 33. The date was accidentally omitted; his letter was dated January 9, 1997.
- 3 The official Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood report on the May 27 meeting and adopted guidelines can be found in the CBMW News 2:3 (June 1997). Lars Dunberg's "Open Letter" (addressed to Friends and Readers), published as an advertisement in Christianity Today (July 14, 1997), gives his interpretation of events. See also the very useful report by Doug LeBlanc entitled "Hands Off My NIV!" in Christianity Today (June 16, 1997; pages 52-55).
- 4 Christianity Today (June 16, 1997; page 55).
- 5 For a much more detailed discussion of such issues in the context of this particular controversy, see Grant R. Osborne, "Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture? No," Christianity Today (October 27, 1997), 33-38. In the same issue Wayne Grudem writes the "Yes" article (pages 27-32); each also responds to the other (page 39).
- 6 See my review of the NIV New Testament (1973) in the Journal of Biblical Literature 93 (1974), 591-94.
- 7 The examples of the continuation of some uses of the so-called "generic male" expressions, cited by Wayne Grudem (in the Christianity Today and the CBMW News noted above) are relatively inconsequential and certainly do not contradict the reality of the massive gender inclusive changes taking place in American English. See also my Priscilla Papers article of a year ago.
- 8 See my article "Participation in the Issues of Women and Ministry in the New Testament," Perspectives in Religious Studies 15 (1988), 101-08, for a longer discussion of what I perceive to be the deeper issues (the so-called bottom line). I there give the documentation for the John Woodhouse quotation (page 107).
- 9 See note 5. The last paragraph is on page 32.
- 10 www.cbmw.org. I am referring here to what I downloaded on September 22, 1997. I do not know when and for how long this was on the CBMW website.

Perhaps you've heard people say: "If the King James was good enough for St. Paul, then it's good enough for us." Perhaps they didn't know that the King James Version, published in 1611, was not available to St. Paul, who ministered roughly in the time period 35-65 AD!

Unfortunately, many people do not realize that "there is no such thing as translating a book into another language once and for all, for language is a changing thing." As C.S. Lewis argues: "If your son is to have clothes, it is no good buying him a suit once and for all—he will grow out of it and have to be reclothed."

The reason we need to have periodic retranlations of the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts is that language is a living thing, part and parcel of the life and history of a people. Words are full of shades of meaning and associations—which makes it incumbent upon us to engage in periodic retranslation because those shades of meaning and associations are ever-changing. Such retranslation can make it difficult for some of us to give up what has become familiar, even if the familiar is incomprehensible to many of our contemporaries.

This matter of English translation was quite vitriolic when it first surfaced in the Church over 500 years ago. Prior to that, the Scriptures were in Latin and access was effectively limited to the clergy. It was thought that the Scriptures were "too sacred" to be read by the laity. Battles were fought and people were even burned at the stake for their efforts to render the Bible in the vernacular.

The Reformation did much to bring about change, eventually resulting in the King James Version. Various revisions of that version have been offered over the centuries, as well as a profusion of new English translations and paraphrases. Discovery of more reliable ancient documents led to some of these revisions; naturally occurring changes of common speech led to others. The result for us is at times a bewildering selection of translations, versions, and choices. All of them, to a certain extent, bear the theological impulse of the person or group that produced them. All of them have value in that they seek to make God's word available and accessible.

The history of the translation of the Bible is a fascinating one. Let us be grateful that we have the freedom to choose and the Word at hand.

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THE NIVI AND THE FUTURE OF EVANGELICALISM

An Open Letter to James Dobson, Paige Patterson, Wayne Grudem, Lars Dunberg and Bruce Ryskamp... and the other signers of the Colorado Springs Guidelines

Dear Brothers in Christ:

As someone who has long been committed to a thoroughly evangelical viewpoint, I write to share my concern with: the process surrounding the decision to withdraw the inclusive-language version of the NIV (NIVI), the May 27 guidelines, and their implications for the future of evangelicalism.

I fear that both some of the tactics used in the debate and also the process by which the IBS reversed directions and the guidelines were issued threaten the unity and cohesion of the evangelical movement. Many evangelicals—probably a majority—disagree with your position. That we disagree over some important issues, however, in spite of our common evangelical commitments, is not fundamentally dangerous. But the way we deal with those differences could become disastrous.

Dr. Patterson, in your attack on the NIVI, Zondervan and Willow Creek Church, you denounce Willow Creek leaders for their “feminist ideology” and lack of tolerance toward other views (because they have decided that all leaders there must support women at all levels of church leadership). Then you add: “What will be next at Willow Creek—openness to same-sex marriages, even more openness to the killing of preborns in the wombs of their mothers? Who knows...? All these ideas are the frequent riding partners of the feminist gang” (National Liberty Journal, May 1997).

Dr. Patterson, you know that Willow Creek does not in any way endorse same-sex marriages. Would you want this kind of false innuendo used against you? Do you consider it an honest, fair way to debate important issues within the Christian community? Do we not seriously damage the evangelical movement when we use this kind of tactic against each other?

I am puzzled by your charge that Willow Creek has a “lack of tolerance.” Dr. Grudem, you even comment with reference to the Willow Creek position that “the way an egalitarian view triumphs is by a suppression of information and discussion” (World, March 29, 1997). Yet all of you put enormous pressure on the IBS and Zondervan to withdraw the NIVI so that nobody else could use it. Would it not have been far more consistent with this plea for tolerance to have urged IBS and Zondervan to continue publishing both the original NIV and a new NIVI?

Dr. Dobson, in your column in World (May 3-10, 1997) you begin with an imaginary “inclusive” language rewriting of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address which refers to God as “Father and Mother.” Since you use this imaginary rewrite to argue against the new NIVI, the implication clearly is that the NIVI is connected in some direct way to referring to God as Mother. You know very well that the NIVI does nothing of the kind. Why then this implication of something that is not correct? I do not want to believe that you consciously chose to smear the NIVI by falsely intimating something that is not true. I need your help, Dr. Dobson, to understand what Christian motive led you to this debating tactic.

Here, I ignore World magazine’s tactics except to quote from a letter to the editor (which World declined to publish) written by Dr. Kenneth L. Barker (one of the more conservative members of the CBT who continues to sign the revised Colorado Springs Guidelines). Dr. Barker writes: “The CT article was fair, objective, balanced, and quite positive. Yours was precisely the opposite—slanted, negative, sensationalistic and mean-spirited. In all your articles and editorials on this controversy from March till now (mid-June), I have discerned a consistent pattern of misquotation...incorrect information...wrong connections...sensationalism and tabloid style journalism...negativism...destructive intent...inflammatory rhetoric...etc. (I could easily continue). Now you know why I do not subscribe to World and why I will not consent to another interview with World.”

The process of decision-making is equally disturbing. How, Dr. Dunberg, could the IBS reverse its decision to publish the NIVI in light of this pressure without widespread consultation with the full range of evangelical scholars and without allowing your own Committee for Bible Translation (CBT) to make the basic decisions about the most accurate translations? (After all, the Committee for Bible Translation was designed precisely to insulate the process of careful translation from irrelevant ideological pressure of any sort.)

And how, to make matters worse, could you and Dr. Ryskamp agree, at a highly unrepresentative meeting called by someone with very little training in the question at issue and attended by very few specialists in biblical translation, to endorse detailed guidelines for Bible translation? (I am glad to see that your names are no longer listed as signers of these guidelines.) Magazine and book publishers are hardly the best persons to make technical, complex decisions about the most accurate translation of the biblical Hebrew and Greek. Nor is a meeting heavily weighted toward Focus on the Family and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood even close to being representative of American evangelicalism.

That two of evangelicalism's most respected and influential agencies (the IBS and Zondervan) would allow such a small, ad hoc, and extremely one-sided group representing only one side of the debate to make decisions that profoundly affect the full evangelical community is extremely disturbing—indeed, potentially disastrous for the future of evangelicalism.

All evangelicals agree on central biblical beliefs. But we vigorously disagree on lesser but substantive issues like double predestination, infant baptism, and just war. It is right for individual churches and denominations to take sides on such issues. It is not intolerant for Calvinist denominations to insist that all their leaders accept Calvin's understanding of predestination—or for the Nazarenes to insist on their position on free will.

But a commitment to Jesus' prayer for the unity of his one body (John 17) and a concern for the cohesion of the evangelical movement demands that we have larger, trans-denominational structures where we can work together on the basis of our common evangelical commitments even though we disagree on things like predestination and infant baptism. Not only the National Association of Evangelicals but large trans-denominational institutions like the IBS and Zondervan Publishing House function in this way for the evangelical community. It is right for Mennonites to insist on pastors who reject all killing and for just war denominations to do the reverse. Local churches and specific denominations should insist on those distinctive beliefs when they believe they best represent biblical teaching. But evangelicalism as an important trans-denominational movement will collapse if our major trans-denominational structures do not welcome evangelicals of differing views.

That is why the heavy pressure (even if it had been argued fairly) on IBS and Zondervan to make what had widely come to be seen as "the leading evangelical Bible translation" conform to their own (minority) viewpoint within the large evangelical community is so unacceptable. It is grounded in a fundamental misunderstanding of the proper roles of different institutions. It is appropriate for Willow Creek and the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood to disagree on ordaining women. And both ought to try to persuade the other of their "mistake" because both cannot be right. But it is wrong and intolerant for either to use pressure tactics to force large trans-denominational evangelical organizations to adopt only their viewpoint.

In the interest of preserving and strengthening the unity and cohesion of the evangelical movement, I beg you to do two things:

First, urge the IBS to give its circle of translation experts (the CBT) full freedom to make the best scholarly decisions they can about the most faithful way to translate the Scriptures into contemporary English.

Second, urge the IBS and Zondervan to publish *both* versions of the NIV (modified in whatever way our best exegetes deem accurate). If Focus on the Family wanted to use a version of the NIV deemed a faithful translation by our best scholarly experts on the CBT, I hope I would never (even if I had the power) try to force the IBS to stop publishing that version, even if I thought it had weaknesses. I hope, Dr. Dobson, you will stop doing the same to the vast numbers of evangelicals who prefer the NIVI. As we continue—vigorously but fairly—to debate which translation is more accurate, let's together display Christian tolerance and urge the IBS to publish both.

Sincerely,

Ron Sider

RJS:nrm

Dr. Ronald J. Sider is professor of theology at Eastern Baptist Theological Seminary, president of Evangelicals for Social Action, and a prolific author. Another version of this letter is also being published in PRISM magazine, Jan/Feb 1998.

GOOD NEWS FOR ALL PEOPLE

Catherine Clark Kroeger

One of my seminary students was leading a group of eight-year-olds at Vacation Bible School. The Scripture portion was John 15:5, a text in which the Greek used an indefinite pronoun, “anyone,” although it had been rendered as “man” in the New International Version of the Bible. Thus the children read:

I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

In the ensuing discussion, a question was raised as to whether this Scripture applied to everyone or only to men. Every single child said the text was directed *expressly* to men and not to women.

Upon hearing my recital of this story, my eight-year-old granddaughter volunteered the information that “man” and “he” meant male in regular school but could mean both genders in Sunday School! Her Sunday School, considered a flagship of Christian education in our denomination, is to be congratulated. But what of the children who do not have the benefit of such a Sunday School? Is the Bible only for those schooled in the niceties of evangelical phraseology? Jesus said, “Let the little ones come unto me, and do not obstruct them (Mt 19:14).”

THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE BIBLE

A major biblical theme is the universality of the Gospel. The angels proclaimed “great joy which shall be to all people,” while Jesus told his disciples to bring the Gospel to “all creation” (Mk 16:15). Salvation is to be made known to the ends of the earth. The joyous news is that *whosoever will* may come and that *any* who wish may drink of the waters of life. The Apostle Paul was quite specific that “the man is not without the woman, nor the woman without the man in the Lord” (1 Cor 11:11-12).

From its opening pages, the Bible carefully stipulates the inclusion of women. In Genesis 5:1-2 we read:

When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them. And when they were created, he called them “man” [*adam*].

As the NIV Study Bible correctly notes, “Man” [*adam*] clearly denotes both genders in Genesis 3:22-24, as well as in many other places in the Scriptures. Other male terminology often denotes inclusivity, especially in the plural. Even the King James Version renders *banim* (literally “sons”) as the “children” of Israel. *Adelphoi*, the New Testament word for siblings, includes both male and female when used in the plural. In the singular, however, it is necessary to say “brother or sister.” Examples of this may be found in 1 Corinthians 7:15¹ and James 2:15.

CLARIFYING THE BIBLE'S MESSAGE TO ALL PEOPLE IN TODAY'S WORLD

How distressing to discover that some of those who have taken on the task of rendering the Bible into English wish to limit the universality of the Gospel. There is a move to restrict the inclusivity of the original message, even if appropriate revision may more accurately represent the intention of the biblical author. Some are refusing to use indefinite pronouns (anyone, somebody, people, etc.) even when such indefinite pronouns appear in the *original* texts! Masculine vocabulary such as “man,” “he,” and “brothers” is being used as it was in a bygone era when these words were understood to include persons of both genders. For example, seventeenth-century poet John Donne, in telling of Eden's original couple, speaks of “two men” in the garden. But in the ensuing centuries our language has become more precise about gender, although this has not always been recognized in Christian communities of faith.

In addition, we must bear in mind that many readers do not have English as their first language. Some are immigrants; many more are residents of other lands who are increasingly using our mother tongue in commercial, scientific, technical, diplomatic, cultural and academic situations.

Our Laotian foster son was tremendously puzzled when he first met the Bible by way of the King James Version. A Laotian translation helped correct many of his misconceptions and later opened the way for him to read a simplified English version.

Thus a guideline supplied by a major evangelical translation agency (Wycliffe) to their trainees calls for a translation “in which the message that is communicated is as close as we can get to what we determine is the message that the original writer wanted to convey.”² The instructions also include the directive that “the translation should make the message easy to understand. There should be no phrases which are confusing or which could be misunderstood.”

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Surely these instructions are in the spirit of the New Testament writers who used the trade language of the Mediterranean world (*koine* or mongrelized Greek) in order to reach as broad an audience as possible.

Admittedly, some of us who were raised on King James English still find that version the most beautiful, but it is not the most meaningful for rising generations. As language changes, translations must be revised in order to be comprehensible to new audiences seeking to know God's Word.

For grammar does indeed change. How horrified my old high school English teacher would be at the termination of sentences with a preposition and the splitting of infinitives, even in prestigious journals! But even in the days of King James, certain accommodations had already been made between grammatical structures in the biblical texts and the English translation. Participles, for instance, occur far more frequently in the Greek New Testament than any English reader would imagine. A more accurate understanding of the ancient writer's actual intent is made by rendering many of these participles as indicatives. This is commonplace in translation.

Currently there is real questioning as to whether singulars may be rendered as plurals in order to demonstrate inclusivity. Some involved in the debate refuse to place a plural pronoun with a singular antecedent, i.e. "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation." Nevertheless, the precedent for such a practice in written English reaches back to the sixteenth century!

How can the Bible's message be put into a lucid form of communication for the contemporary reader? Surely not by retaining gender differentiations that were not intended by the biblical author! If the English language has changed, then we must make God's Word available in the new form. If "man," "he," and "his" no longer denote persons of both genders, then we must make sure that the original universality of God's expression is clearly understood. The real consideration is whether the language will enable men and women to understand that the message is addressed to *both*. God's message must be conveyed to *every* living creature.

RENDERING THE BIBLE RELEVANT & ACCESSIBLE

I have a son who is a Bible translator, a man whose first priority is to get God's message across. He has sometimes lived with his family in arduous conditions—without electricity, running water, refrigeration or communication. His purpose is to make the Scriptures accessible to individuals who have no Bible in their own language. In the countries where he works, the men frequently know enough of the trade language to communicate in the marketplace, but it is the women who will never understand the Gospel unless it is put into their mother tongue. It is for them that so many missionaries

invest years of their lives. Why are aboriginal women given an opportunity that is denied to some women in evangelical American churches?

BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

Biblical precedent demands that women as well as men be accorded the opportunity not only to hear the Word of God but also to have it made comprehensible to them. One such incident occurred after the return from the Babylonian exile. The captives who had dwelt in a strange land and foreign culture were at last home. Women had joined in the rebuilding of Jerusalem (Neh 3:12) and were a basic part of the faith community. When the groundwork was being laid for the establishment of a renewed society, Scripture records:

Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and women and all who were able to understand. He read aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law.... The Levites read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.... Then all the people went away to eat and drink, to send portions of food and to celebrate with great joy, because they now understood the words that had been made known to them (Neh 8:2-12).

There is a debate as to whether the "making clear" supplied by the Levites constituted an explanation of the text or a translation of the Hebrew into the more common Aramaic language of the people. Two things become evident: first, that the population returning from Babylonia needed help in order to understand the centuries-old Hebrew text. Second, a major objective was to provide women with a comprehension of the Scriptures that might be applied to their own hearts. Only when there was a thorough-going understanding of the ancient texts did the people, both men and women, respond with joy and thanksgiving.

On the Day of Pentecost, the Spirit enabled believers to tell the acts of God to each person present in his or her mother tongue. Although they were all devout Jews, they had gathered from many districts, and the message had to be given in tongues other than Hebrew. This was the work of the Holy Spirit, and none can deny the need or validity of communicating the message in a form that makes it accessible. Again the presence and involvement of women is directly specified (Acts 2:17-18). Thus both the re-establishment of a believing society in Israel and the establishment of the Church are introduced with the giving of God's Word to women and men alike, in language that can be readily comprehended by a new generation.

We are often told that the first occurrence of a theme in biblical history is one that has particular importance and

deserves serious consideration. Therefore, one cannot be faithful to the biblical mandate without also acknowledging the right of women to receive and share the Word of God. The female adherents of the great biblical scholar, Jerome, insisted upon and assisted him with the world's most famous and widely used translation of the Bible, the Latin Vulgate. By the Fourth Century, ordinary people (especially women) no longer understood the original biblical languages, thus the necessity for a Bible in the common (vulgar) language. The coterie of Christian women who had showered the poor and needy with countless works of love made sure that the message of love was available in the people's own tongue.

Then came the efforts of Wycliffe, Tyndale, and others to make the Bible intelligible even to plowboys. Frequently the translators paid for their efforts with their own lives.

The Pilgrims refused to use the so-called Coverdale Bible because its use was forbidden to "servants, laborers and housewives." Only a translation that was for all people was acceptable to them. Yet, ironically, Anne Hutchison drew the ire of the Pilgrim Fathers by insisting on the right of women to read and study the Scriptures.

Another woman, Helen Barrett Montgomery, produced one of the very earliest New Testaments in modern speech.

As each of these time-honored versions became antiquated, new ones had to keep pace with our ever-changing language. The need continues for constant revisions, and these should not be blocked, nor can they be blocked, any more than the works of God's saints in ages past.

FAITHFULNESS TO THE BIBLICAL MESSAGE

We cannot uphold a basic tenet of the Gospel if we do not insist that the language of Scripture be consistent with the universality of the Gospel message. The objective of multitudes of Bible translators has been to render the message of Scripture in a form that will be most accessible to readers and also as faithful as possible to the original text. Evangelicals feel that the authority lies within the text; thus the need is to know what Scriptures actually say rather than what we would like them to say. Popular pressure is therefore a very poor criterion on which to make decisions about Bible translations. Scripture speaks of "those who suppress the truth in injustice" (Rom 1:18) and also of "handling the Word of God deceitfully" (2 Cor 4:2). Since we believe the Bible is inspired by God, it is incumbent on all Christians to seek an understanding of the text that lies closest to the expression and intent of the original author who wrote under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Each translator will render any given passage a little differently, yet a conscientious scholar will take care never to make women feel excluded in a way that was never intended by the writers of Scripture. An honest rendering must convey the good news that both men *and* women are included and *both* are objects of God's love and grace.

THE WOMEN BESIDE THE ROAD

As our Saviour carried his cross to Calvary, a great crowd of women lined his path and lamented the fate that was to be his. In the face of his own death, Jesus paused to address these faithful female followers and to express concern for what they would experience. He spoke of those who must flee during pregnancy, or with a nursing child in their arms. The coming destruction of Jerusalem would render them its most vulnerable victims. Jesus understood their vulnerability and displayed an intense empathy for the plight of women.

It seems to me that today some well-intentioned followers of the Master have ignored this vulnerability of women who still stand beside the road. The manner of handling the NIV controversy cannot fail to make faithful women feel even more side-lined, marginalized, and disenfranchised. Unfortunately, ill-advised terms and a rhetoric have been employed that can only wound, depress and alienate.

An adversary of the NIVI wrote an article entitled "Bible Translation as Battleground."³ Yes, our Saviour warned women of a coming battle and expressed profound compassion for the wounds and perils they would suffer. The military analogy of this title leads women to feel that they are indeed under attack, and they cannot fail to feel the hostility. Another opponent declared, "You don't compromise Scripture *just to make women feel included.*"⁴ How can such language fail to make them feel excluded? Women do not ask for compromise but for faithfulness to the words of a Saviour who called them to his side, who chose them to be the first witnesses of his resurrection. Women still are hungry to know that the Bible belongs to them and is relevant to their needs and experiences.

Christians have often left women standing on the side of the road, and many have been driven away by the callous treatment they received. Others bear deep wounds and bitter resentment. Do opponents of *biblically-faithful* inclusive language care about the further spiritual, emotional and psychological damage inflicted in the wake of this sorry episode? Where is the grace that was demonstrated by the Man of Calvary to those women who lined his way?

1 In the first case, even though the Greek uses the masculine and feminine forms of "brother," the NIV renders it "a believing man or woman."

2 John Beekman, Questions and Answers On: The Wycliffe Approach to Translations, p. 3.

3 John Piper, "Bible Translation as Battleground: Problems in Gender Changes from the New International Version to the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition." Touchstone 10.3, Summer 1997, pp. 40-41.

4 Yonat Shimron, Raleigh News and Observer, Saturday, May 21, 1997.

“BURY ME WITH MY FATHERS:” A SEXIST OR AN INCLUSIVE VIEW OF DEATH?

Arthur H. Lewis

As a translator of the Old Testament and member of several NIV teams, I've had many opportunities to protest against the use of sexist language wherever 'adam or ben-'adam is generic and clearly refers to both men and women. For example, in the Creation account, "He created man ('adam) in his own image... male and female, he created them" (1:26-27), 'adam should read either "the human race" or "people." The same is probably true for Genesis 2:5, 3:21, 5:1 and 6:3. Certainly the 'adam in Psalm 8:4 deserves to be rendered "human beings" or "men and women."

A parallel example is found repeatedly in the books of the Old Testament. It is a Hebrew phrase that describes death as being "gathered to my fathers" or "buried with my fathers" (Gen 49:29). Elsewhere the Lord promised Abraham: "You will go to your fathers in peace" (Gen 15:15), and told Moses, "You are going to rest with your fathers" (Deut 31:16).

There are a number of reasons to understand "fathers" (Hebrew *aboth*) in these contexts as a generic term. I believe Jacob was referring not just to the male members of his family, to whom he hoped to be joined in death, but to his wives and female ancestors as well.

PHYSICAL PROXIMITY

First, as many interpret the phrase, Jacob may have had in mind the physical burial of his body beside the bodies of his fathers "in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite" (49:29). If this were Jacob's wish, then when he said, "bury me with my fathers," he meant "bury my body at Hebron in the family tomb, the one bought by Abraham for his beloved wife, Sarah, the cave in the field of Machpelah." Therefore, we must note, as Jacob himself recalls, this tomb was also the resting place of two other women: Rebekah (his mother and Isaac's wife) and Leah, his own first wife, whom he buried there himself (49:31).

All tourists who have recently visited the Mosque in Hebron that is built above the (traditional) cave of Machpelah will testify that the tombs on the upper level still include these patriarchal women beside their husbands, just as Jacob describes them in this passage. If he is requesting, therefore, that his body rest in close proximity to those of his "fathers," then his grandmother, mother, and first wife would have to be included in the meaning of the term as well.

PARALLEL WITH "HIS PEOPLE"

Jacob told his sons in Egypt that he would soon be "gathered to my people" (49:29), and the inspired author records that he "breathed his last and was gathered to his people"

(v. 33). Genesis also informs us that Abraham "lived a hundred and seventy-five years... and was gathered to his people" (25:8). In each of these uses the Hebrew term for "people" ('am) is substituted for "fathers," and helps to further define its meaning.

But 'am is never a term for males only; rather, it stands for all citizens, male and female, of a nation or land (11:6). When the three sons of Noah repopulated the earth, "from them came the people who were scattered over the earth" (9:19). Their three wives were the "mothers," seldom remembered, who made that repopulation happen.

Obviously there were child-producing women in the nations, or the nations could never have increased and scattered, as the Lord commanded (9:7). The word for "people," therefore, can not be sexist in the Hebrew Bible, exclusive of the female members of any community, nor can "fathers" be included in a "men only" category.

PLURAL IN FEMININE FORM

Only readers of the Hebrew language can appreciate the surprise that comes with the discovery that the plural for father ('abh) is not 'abhim (common masculine plural, as might be expected), but 'abhoth (feminine, plural). This same transfer is true of other masculine nouns, such as *shulchanoth* for "tables," but never seems to affect the translation or meaning. The feminine plural suggests that "fathers" has a generic connotation and is inclusive of both sexes. Thus, the NRSV translates 'abhoth as "ancestors" in Deuteronomy 31:16, referring to both men and women.

Moses says that the plague of locusts "will fill your houses... something neither your parents or grandparents have seen (Ex 10:6), a hardship clearly shared by the women in each household!

JACOB'S LONGING FOR RACHEL

Jacob's most beloved wife was not Leah but Rachel, for whom he paid her father Laban fourteen years of labor (Gen 29:18-30). Rachel died giving birth to Benjamin, and was buried near Bethlehem (35:16-19), so her body was not in the family tomb at Hebron.

However, the ancient Hebrews may have held a spiritual view of death, meaning a gathering with the spirits of their ancestors (Ecc 12:7, 2 Sam 12:23). If this were so, then Jacob would have longed to be, after his death, in the presence of his beloved mother, Rebekah (25:28), and his beautiful wife, Rachel (29:17-18). This desire would probably have been even greater than to be joined to his forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. We know from what Jesus said that their souls are not dead, but alive with God (Mt 22:32).

These four arguments based on the original text support my contention that "fathers" is a generic term in these phrases referring to death in the Hebrew Scriptures, and that "fathers" was not intended to be a sexist term referring to men only.

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AM I WRONG BECAUSE I'M POLITICALLY CORRECT?

TEN REASONS TO EMBRACE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE REVISION

David R. Leigh

How many times have you heard from the lips of conservatives, “I’m *not* politically correct, and proud of it!”?

The badge of political incorrectness began as an oft-appropriate response to ideas and values imposed on us culturally by political liberals—a backlash against left-wing “thought police” whose anti-traditional values ironically included opposition to censorship, absolutes, and “legislated morality.”

Conservatives rightly saw through this, noting that thought restriction is itself a form of censorship, that left-wing ideas can become cultural absolutes, and that imposition of liberal values is often an oppression greater than most so-called conservative moral legislations.

Antagonism toward anything politically correct is now the knee-jerk reaction of conservatives and calling something politically correct has become a shortcut for discrediting it. Likewise, to declare something politically incorrect is to ascribe to it a kind of boldness and integrity.

But as I sat watching a news interview recently, I heard a Ku Klux Klan grand wizard make an interesting statement. You guessed it: “I’m not politically correct and I’m proud of it!”

Sadly, this shorthand method of discrediting by calling something PC has been used in at least two recent situations in evangelical circles. First, it was used successfully to derail efforts by the team of scholars known as the Committee for Bible Translation (CBT) to update the New International Version (NIV) of the Bible into truly contemporary English. Second, it was used unsuccessfully at the 1997 Baptist General Conference (BGC) Annual Meeting regarding proposed revisions of the BGC Affirmation of Faith. And though its use in the latter case failed to prevent the needed revisions, it did not fail to damage some people’s respect for the outcome.

In both cases, the literary revisions involved a switch to gender-inclusive language. Simply defined, *inclusive language* is speech that includes everyone, without making people who are intended to be included feel left out, especially where gender is concerned. According to the editors of the NIV Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI, Hodder & Stoughton), *inclusive language translation* may be defined in this way: “Where the original languages are considered to refer to humanity in general or to a person

of either gender but do so using masculine terminology, revisions have been made to restore the *intention* of the original texts” (italics added). Note that this kind of translation, as practiced by all major inclusive language versions, including the NRSV and NIVI, in no way attempts to neuter or feminize God or to tamper in any way with the Trinity or members of the Trinity.¹ In other words, inclusive language revision is an effort to clarify the original intent of the biblical authors regarding human persons. Nothing could be more conservative or evangelical in motivation.

Likewise, in the BGC’s revision of its Affirmation, most of the delegates saw the changes and the need for them as common sense.² Where “men” means “all people,” where “fellowmen” means “others,” and where “a Christian” refers to both “he” and “she” rather than just “he,” the changes needed to be made. So voted the assembly. Next year’s final vote on this revision will take place in New England, where BGC churches may be more resistant to these changes. Since the New England churches are likely to be among the best represented, it may be premature to assume the BGC is out of the woods on this issue, especially since the final vote requires a two-thirds majority, whereas the provisional approval only required 51 percent.

There are at least ten reasons evangelicals should support the efforts of scholars and denominations in the quest for inclusive language revision.

1. THE NEED FOR CLARITY

As BGC President Dr. Robert Ricker noted, in an age when denominations display the Gospel and their faith documents around the world via the Internet, and at such a time when gender-biased language is a barrier to getting one’s message across, these gender-sensitive changes are needed to ensure that the full intent of the Gospel message is communicated. As he humorously put it, “We want to make sure women know they’re sinners too” and that Jesus also died for them. Again, nothing could be more conservative or evangelical in motivation.

Yet the opponents of inclusive language at the BGC annual meeting were quick to take their short cut, charging that this was a concession to political correctness. Some warned of a “slippery slope” leading to a day when the denomination’s affirmation might read: “We believe in the Bible insofar as it is politically correct.”

“If we need to change words that unsaved people don’t understand,” one pastor challenged, “then maybe we

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should also change words like redemption and regeneration.”

Though changing such words for clarification actually may not be a bad idea, there is a big difference between these words and the gender-accurate ones addressed by this proposed revision. Terms like “redemption” and “regeneration” can be explained without having to correct them, for the general disuse of these terms in contemporary culture has made their meanings only relatively unfamiliar. However, when we come to words like “*man*” or the Christian and “*his*” conduct, the best pastors and teachers find themselves saying things like, “It *says* ‘man,’ but it *means* ‘men and women.’” No one explains that “It says ‘redemption’ but it means something else.” The word “redemption” says what it means and needs no apologies, although it may need to be explained to some people today. In the case of gender-biased language, however, words like “*man*” and “*his* conduct” do not say what they mean. This is the most obvious reason why they need to be changed.

2. A CORRECT DEFINITION OF THE TERMS INVOLVED CALLS FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

If inclusive language is simply speech that includes everyone, then what usage could be more fitting for the Gospel, denominational statements of faith, and Bible translations, where intended inclusivity has been obscured?

As John Stott put it: “When *man* means human being, and when the use of *brothers* was never intended to exclude sisters, then to retain such gender-specific words would be offensive.... Even worse, it would actually misrepresent the meaning of the biblical text.”³

3. THE CLAIM THAT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS A COMPROMISE WITH CULTURE MISUNDERSTANDS THE RELATIONSHIP OF CHRISTIANITY TO OUR CULTURE

We should remember who influenced whom. It was evangelicals, like John Wesley and Charles Finney, whose Gospel preaching not only sparked the flames of revival and abolition but also led to the elevation of women in the life and ministry of the Church and to the women’s suffrage movement in general society.

Besides, just because a position reflects secular culture, this does not automatically discredit that position. For example, few if any Bible-believing evangelicals today would argue in favor of slavery. Our culture ended slavery through an uncivil Civil War rather than by the mere spread of biblical teaching. Yet the abolitionist movement was first espoused by Christians who believed that, though slavery appeared to be accepted by biblical authors, the seeds of abolition could be found in the Bible. The same evangelists whose Gospel preaching sparked revival and abolition also led the way in the suffragist

movement and in elevating women in the church. Convince the public of slavery’s injustice, one abolitionist wrote, and it would be “an easy matter to take millions of females from their knees and set them on their feet... transform[ing] them from babies into women.”⁴ So just as we do not compromise with our culture today when we reject slavery, neither do we compromise with it when we stand with those abolitionists who also pioneered the inclusion and equality of women in their schools, churches, and society.

4. WE HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO THE GREAT COMMISSION TO REACH AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE WITH THE TRUTH

In a fallen world, languages are imperfect. English and the ancient languages of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek are no exception. Yet God’s revelation through imperfect human authors and imperfect human words remains perfect. This revelation teaches that when God created “man” in his own image, he created them male and female (Gen 1:26-27). Therefore, “man” was intended by God to be an inclusive term. But we live in a time when the intent of that inclusiveness has been lost and confused by cultural language barriers. Inclusive language restores the original intent. If the language we speak can be redeemed to clarify that no group of people is less equal or less valued by God than others, it is our moral obligation to the Gospel to do so.

5. THE CULTURAL CRY FOR INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS A CRY FOR ACCEPTANCE AND LOVE

Yes, inclusive language and “politically correct” speech reflect concerns within our culture. But this only shows that our culture and a significant portion of its members are crying out for acceptance, equality, and the affirmation that they too are loved and valued by God and others. What is the biblical message if not that Christ died for all and that all are forgiven and accepted equally in Christ?

6. INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS A MORAL ISSUE THAT SHOULD BE OBSERVED BY ALL CONSCIENTIOUS CHRISTIANS

Just as no Bible-believer should tolerate racist language, neither should we tolerate sexist language. We oppose racism because it is morally wrong to degrade, devalue, discriminate against, or subjugate any part of humanity based on created, natural, biological, or socio-cultural differences. What racism does according to racial distinctions, sexism does according to gender. Therefore we must reject and purge ourselves of sexist and gender-exclusionary language wherever and whenever possible.

It behooves us as God's redemptive agents to act as salt and light in transforming our culture's use of language so that it better reflects God's Kingdom values. If in fact the culture is ahead of us in this, it is to our shame. The Church of Jesus should be on the forefront of this transformation process, showing the way and setting new standards of excellence. Those who resist this transformation look to the conventions of the past to determine today's and tomorrow's standards for English, instead of looking to Kingdom principles. In other words, having put their hand to the plow of modern translation, they now look back and become unfit for the task of communicating the Gospel to modern minds. As a result, they not only hinder the spread of the Gospel, but they deter the Church from carrying out her work of reclaiming the world and of reversing the effects of the Fall in culture.

7. NO CURRENT ENGLISH TRANSLATION OR EXPRESSION OF THE GOSPEL CAN CLAIM TO BE TRULY AND ACCURATELY CONTEMPORARY WITHOUT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

Inclusive language is simply the new standard for English today. It is how English is being taught, adapted and adopted across the English-speaking world. The future of English is therefore inclusive. Again, it is to our shame if the Church is behind in this, since these inclusive changes are so much more suitable to the Gospel than are those conventions of fallen patriarchalist cultures.

In purely pragmatic terms, organizations like the International Bible Society who ignore the tremendous shift now taking place in the English language will simply find their publications increasingly regarded as dated and as belonging to shrinking markets in the generations to come.

8. THE NEED TO TRANSLATE INTO INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IS THEREFORE THE SAME AS THE NEED TO TRANSLATE AT ALL, AND ESPECIALLY THE NEED TO TRANSLATE INTO THE VERNACULAR

It is remarkable how the outcry against changing the NIV is so similar to the long-heard resistance to modern translations in general. Have evangelicals simply replaced the old King James Version with another translation of fossilized language? And with that fossilization will we again make the Word of God less accessible and more foreign to our lost neighbors and loved ones? Will our prayers, affirmations of faith, and the songs we sing sound as archaic and out of touch as when we sanctified Elizabethan English as a hallmark of spirituality?

As a pastor, I have for years discouraged the use of the KJV because of our strong evangelical tradition that calls for the Word of God to be translated into every tongue, including our own modern-day idiom. This tradition dates

back to the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament into Greek because Hebrew and Aramaic had ceased to be the common languages of the people. Likewise, the New Testament was written in *koiné* Greek, the language of the streets. Jerome's Latin Vulgate reflects the fact that Latin was the "vulgar," or vernacular, tongue of his day. Wycliffe, Tyndale and Luther risked their lives to keep the Word of God accessible to their times and cultures. This tradition is the reason why we all can worship in our own languages and are not required to do so in a preserved Greek or Latin—or, in the case of the Baptist General Conference, Swedish.

Now it is time to do the same with inclusive language. As our predecessors stood against the scorn of rigid and petrifying religious institutions, so ought we.

9. THE GOSPEL AND THE CHURCH WERE INTENDED TO BE INCLUSIVE

It was Jesus' stated mission to lift up the downtrodden and release the oppressed (Lk 4:18). The Spirit of the Lord was intended to empower both men and women with authority from on high (Ac 2:16-18). And the Church was to be a place where ethnicity, gender and social status were irrelevant (Gal 3:27-28). Inclusive language affirms and consistently applies these truths.

10. THE ACCUSATION THAT INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE REVISION CAPITULATES TO "PC" CULTURE IS NAIVE AND FAILS TO BE SELF-CRITICAL

Inclusive-language opponents wrongly assume that culture has not also greatly influenced the use of *exclusionary* language from ancient times to today.

Any first-year student of the ancient languages knows that if one is addressing a group of men and women in Hebrew, Aramaic or Greek, and if there is only one man present among a hundred women, yet the group is to be addressed in the masculine. This kind of convention is but one of many possible examples of how culture had to have impacted how the Scriptures were written. Saying this only acknowledges how language worked for the biblical authors and casts no aspersions on the authors themselves. They operated within the conventions of their day and the limitations of their languages. But since today in English we have the option of rising above such conventions, we should do so.

Genesis 3:16 tells us that men would dominate women as a result of the Fall. In fact, though humans were given dominion over all creation, this is the first reference to one human having dominion or rule over another. Anyone who thinks the idea of a created equality between our first parents is a feminist innovation should consider that even Martin Luther recognized this equality as something lost in the Fall.

If Eve had persisted in the truth, she would not only not have been subjected to the rule of her husband, but she herself would also have been a partner in the rule....”⁵ and “if the woman had not sinned, she would have been the equal of Adam in all respects.”⁶

Christ came to redeem and restore what was lost and so a redemptive community needs to restore women to their lost position. But the fallen mindset of human domination has polluted every culture and continues to prevail among opponents of inclusivism. However, whereas sexist language is consistent with the fall, inclusive language is consistent with redemption (cf. Mt 20:25-28; Gal 3:13, 26-28). To assume, therefore, that conventional language and patriarchal culture are somehow less fallen or inherently more valid can only be viewed as a blind spot that betrays the uncritical bias of inclusive language critics.

Ironically, those who charge that inclusive translation and revision are concessions to social pressure are asserting a social pressure of their own. The effects of this were seen when the IBS abandoned its plans to inclusify its American editions—based not on the scholarly decisions of the CBT but on marketing decisions made by administrators with ties to vocal “conservative” organizations.

The result is what Christianity Today recently called “evangelical political correctness.” While placing “evangelical” or “fundamentalist” in front of “PC” may seem like a good Christian alternative, all this really does is perpetuate the problems associated with “thought police,” creating a new set of restrictions that prevents us from dialoguing creatively, constructively, and with integrity. Soon we’ll be discrediting or extolling arbitrary points of view because someone labels them EPC or FPC—“and proud of it!”

It is time to start thinking about issues based on their intrinsic merits, weaknesses, and strengths, rather than on stigmas attached to labels, or solely on the basis of what prominent names are associated with the issues.

It is time to adopt a redemptive mindset about women, language, and how we articulate our faith to the world so that *all* of humanity can know it is redeemed. What matters is not whether or not something is politically correct but if it is redemptively correct, and how we can therefore use it to advance the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

1 Unfortunately the same regard for the Trinity cannot be attributed to some of the opponents of gender-inclusive speech. For example, the departure of John Piper, Wayne Grudem and others in the gender-exclusionary camp from historical trinitarianism has been well documented by Gilbert Bilezikian, “Historical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS), 40/1 (March 1997) 57-68.

2 Here are those changes, as excerpted from the standard, August/September 1997, official magazine of the Baptist General Conference:

Provisional Changes to the Baptist General Conference Constitution

[At its July 1997 annual meeting, delegates of the Baptist General Conference] gave provisional approval to minor modifications in Article III, Sections 3, 6 and 8 of the BGC’s Bylaws

3. God the Father

We believe in God, the Father, an infinite, personal spirit, perfect in holiness, wisdom, power and love. We believe that He concerns Himself mercifully in the affairs of ~~men~~ *all people*, that He hears and answers prayer, and that He saves from sin and death all who come to Him through Jesus Christ.

6. Regeneration

We believe that all ~~men~~ *people* are sinners by nature and by choice and are, therefore, under condemnation. We believe that those who repent of their sins and trust in Jesus Christ as Savior are regenerated by the Holy Spirit.

8. Christian Conduct

We believe a Christians should live for the glory of God and the well-being of ~~his fellowmen~~ *others*, that ~~his~~ *their* conduct should be blameless before the world; that ~~he~~ *they* should be a faithful stewards of ~~his~~ *their* possessions; and that ~~he~~ *they* should seek to realize for ~~himself~~ *themselves* and others the full stature of maturity in Christ.

3 Quoted on the back jacket cover of the NIVI New Testament, Psalms & Proverbs, (Hodder and Stoughten: London, 1995).

4 Theodore Weld in Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angela Weld and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, vol. 1. ed. G. H. Barnes and D. L. Drummond (New York: Appleton-Century Co., 1934), p. 427.

5 *Ibid*, at Genesis 3:16.

6 Martin Luther, Lectures on Genesis, Luther’s Works, vol. 1, ed. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), at Genesis 2:18.

WHICH BIBLE TO USE?

Alvera Mickelsen

Shortly after the controversy over the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) erupted, an older woman in one of my Bible classes asked me, “Are you in favor of changing our Bible?”

I knew immediately to what she was referring since she listens frequently to Jerry Falwell and James Dobson. I said, “Of course I am not in favor of changing God’s Holy Word. But I am in favor of correcting erroneous translations or English language that has changed so much it is no longer readily understood. Aren’t you?” She looked at me with some confusion.

Then I asked, “What translation are you using?” She held it up for me. It was the *New Living Translation*, one of the many translations that uses inclusive, gender-accurate language when the original text so indicates. I told her the fine translation she was using was exactly what she should have and that she need not worry that her Bible had been changed.

Although she is an intelligent woman, very knowledgeable about the Bible, she had been misled by those who wanted to imply that the plans of the NIV committee on Bible translation (CBT) to produce an inclusive-language edition was part of a “feminist seduction of the evangelical church” (headline used in *World* magazine, March 19, 1997).

Why should the effort to produce a gender-accurate Bible become the center of a storm of controversy? It is a sad story that has brought ridicule on evangelicals by all those who have some understanding of the translation process and the constantly changing English language. It is one of the few times in my life when I have been embarrassed to identify myself as an evangelical. And I have learned that many others feel the same.

The New International Version (NIV) was first published in 1978. The translators were respected evangelical scholars skilled in Hebrew or Aramaic (the Old Testament Languages) and/or Greek, the language in which the New Testament was written. The group became known as the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT). In 1984, the NIV came out with its first revision, carrying out the clearly stated goal of the CBT to keep

the NIV up-to-date in light of current biblical scholarship and constantly changing English language usage. The translation committee kept on working, expecting another revision about the turn of the century.

Meanwhile, the British publishers of the NIV (Hodder and Stoughton) were urged by churches in England to have a more gender-accurate translation. The New Revised Standard Version (an inclusive-language translation published in 1989) was becoming widely used in the churches in England, both evangelical and mainline.

Why this interest in new translations? Because it is uncommon for (especially young) people, either in England or the U.S., to use the term “man” or “men” when referring to both men and women. In fact, for the last twenty years or so, writers of elementary and secondary textbooks in the United States have been urged not to use “men” or “man” when referring to people or humans in general. Many tests have been carried out to determine what boys and girls visualize when they read “man” or “men,” even when the context of the term clearly indicates both males and females are meant. Nearly all young people visualize *males*. Thus the use of “man” or “men” presents an erroneous picture of history, literature, and all other subjects where both men and women were involved.

Nearly all newspapers and magazines have changed to more gender-specific terms. Why has the majority of our literature moved in this direction? Is it a “feminist plot” as *World* magazine asserted? Of course not. It is because gender-specific terms (men, women, people, humans, etc.) are more easily and accurately understood. So the question becomes: Do we think it is important for people to clearly understand the Bible? Every devout Christian must answer “Yes.” The issue has *nothing* to do with feminism or a “feminist agenda.” It has everything to do with accurately translating the Bible so that Scripture is clearly understood.

I taught college writing for many years and, like most teachers, insisted that students be specific about genders. When some students insisted it would be easy to understand when “man” or “men” included both sexes, my favorite illustration was a hypothetical sentence that read “Jane Smith was the first man to swim the English Channel.” Everyone agreed that was not acceptable. It had to be “Jane Smith was the first *person* to swim the English Channel.” Nor would it be acceptable to say, “Many *men* entered the race” if the racers included both men and women.

When children read the NIV text of 1 Timothy 2:5-6 (“God Our Savior wants all *men* to be saved. . .

A founding Board member of CBE, Alvera Mickelsen taught at both Wheaton and Bethel Colleges. She and her late husband, Berkeley (who also served on the CBE Board), wrote Understanding Scripture, a lay person’s guide to interpreting the Bible. In addition, Alvera edited Women, Authority and the Bible (available from the CBE Book Service.)

For there is one God and one mediator between God and *men*, the man Christ Jesus who gave himself as a ransom for all *men*” [emphasis added]), they will naturally *visualize* males and wonder, “Are women included?”

The NIVI renders the passage more clearly: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and human beings, Christ Jesus, himself human, who gave himself as a ransom for all.” Which version would you rather give to your daughter or granddaughter?

Interestingly enough, Wayne Grudem, of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and who was very active in the campaign to suppress the NIV Inclusive Language Edition, used this verse as an illustration of the danger of making terms inclusive. He objected to using “Christ Jesus, himself *human*,” because, Grudem said, such a change obscures the truth that Jesus was a man. Actually, the word translated “human” (in verse 5) in the NIVI is *anthropos*, emphasizing Jesus’ humanity, and the NIVI still carefully points out Jesus’ male form by using “who gave *himself* a ransom for all.” Which edition of the NIV do you think is more accurate?

Unfortunately, the original NIV translators bowed to the “male preference” approach in many places. They translated Romans 16:1 “. . .our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea,” although the word “servant” is clearly “deacon” (*diakanos*) in the Greek text. A footnote indicates “deaconess,” which is also inaccurate, since there was no word for deaconess in the first-century church! Even the NIVI published in Great Britain retains that translation. Where is the exact wording here that the Greek text uses—as Grudem and friends say they want?

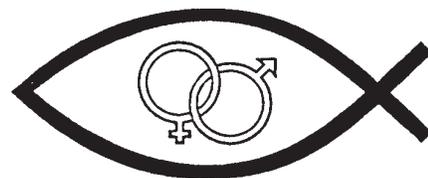
In this matter of suppressing the NIVI in the U.S. and trying to suppress it in the U.K., the story of how a small group of American Fundamentalists has tried to dictate to British and American Christians what Bibles they can publish is a disturbing one. I agree with author Richard Foster who said he had followed the debate with profound sadness. He wrote, “I am concerned that the long-term effects will be disastrous. When the translation scholars of the King James Version stopped revising it (as I recall it went through four or five revisions), they condemned it to becoming an Elizabethan relic. I would hate to see the same kind of thing happen to the NIV.”

So where does this leave us? What kind of Bible can we give to our friends, our children and grandchildren that is written in clear language they can understand? What Bible should churches give their young people at confirmation?

Obviously, it cannot be the NIV, which sometimes makes it look as though the Gospel is only for males. Instead, we can give the New Revised Standard Version, the International Children’s Bible (the Odyssey Bible) the New Living Translation, or other modern speech translations using gender-accurate language.

When you go to your bookstore to buy a Bible for a friend or relative, and you want to see whether it is gender-accurate, look at 1 Timothy 2:4-6. Does the version read, “This pleases God our Savior who wants all *men* to be saved... For there is one God and one mediator between God and *men*” or does it read “God wants all *people* to be saved... For there is one mediator between God and *human beings*,” or something similar. Then you’ll have a way of knowing what kind of Bible you are buying—one that makes the Gospel clearly accessible to men *and* women, boys *and* girls, or only to males? Ask yourself: Is it a translation that makes clear the concern and love of God for *all* people?

We are responsible for transmitting the Word of God in the language of the American people in the 21st century. How sad that one good translation on the verge of being brought up-to-date on American usage has been cancelled. The British translation of the NIVI is still available from CBE (for how long we do not know). Otherwise, take a careful look at any Bible you buy in a bookstore to be sure it will be understandable to the person to whom you give it.



A GENDER MATTER

A RESPONSE TO THE COLORADO SPRINGS GUIDELINES

Aida Besançon Spencer

“This is not a gender matter, it’s a language matter.” Professor Jimmy Duke speaks for many in his comments on translations (*Saint Paul Pioneer*, June, 1997:4D). I beg to disagree. As a professor of New Testament who has served on several translation committees, and as a woman, I propose that the May 27 “Guidelines for Translation” released from Focus on the Family’s headquarters in Colorado Springs are *solely* “a gender matter.”

These guidelines do not appear to achieve accuracy nor do they represent a desire to spread the Good News. Rather, they are guidelines that reflect the prejudice of some men who want to hold on to a power that is not really theirs, sending bad news to women. The Bible is being misused as a weapon rather than a self-examining tool among sincere Christians, shoring up current cultural practice rather than flooding the church with the truth wherever it may lead.

The guidelines are clearly a gender matter in three ways: 1) They are of concern to both males and females; 2) They represent a misunderstanding of grammatical gender; 3) They are an attempt by some men, one gender, to hold on to power even if it should thwart the very good news they propose to advance.

INACCURATE AND INCONSISTENT GUIDELINES

Focus on the Family is a deeply respected organization in evangelical circles. However, stepping out of Focus’ realm of expertise and into biblical translation takes the focus off the family and leads to confusion.

For example, one guideline proposes that “ ‘Man’ should ordinarily be used to designate the human race or human beings in general.” This begs the question: Did God create “human beings” or “man” in his image? Genesis 1:27 itself clarifies this question: “male and female he created them.” The original Hebrew declares that God created “the *adam*,” but “*adam*” is a collective “they.” That is why “the human” would be the most literal translation, but “God created the human in his image”

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See also The Goddess Revival (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), chapters 5-6 regarding language about God, and Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985) about the biblical defense for women in ministry. Both books are available from the CBE Book Service.

is not common English. Thus Odyssey’s New Century Version rendered “the *adam*” as “human beings.”

As a “dynamic equivalent” translation of the Bible, which communicates today’s equivalent of the author’s intention, the New International Version has given such renderings many times. The Church has overwhelmingly welcomed such equivalents. The NIV Committee on Bible Translation explains in its preface that it renders *sabaoth* and *shaddai* by one term, “Almighty,” even though the Hebrew really means “He who is sovereign over all the ‘hosts’ (powers) in heaven and on earth, especially over the ‘hosts’ (armies) of Israel” (NIV Study Bible 1985:xii).

Moreover, I have yet to find a version which literally renders Psalm 17:8a “Guard me as the pupil of the eye.” The NIV and NRSV both render the simile “apple of your eye.” “Apple” in no way is like “pupil” or “eyeball” (in the actual Hebrew), yet no one, as far as I know, has begun a major campaign complaining of inaccuracy! The translators have thought that “apple” best communicates the author’s intention for today’s readers. (Ultimately, every Christian who wants to dig deeper into the Word should learn ancient Greek and Hebrew and not be limited by others’ translations.)

Further, the Colorado Springs guidelines on Bible translation fail to be consistent within themselves. For example, what can we do with a passage such as 1 Timothy 2:5-6? The NIV now reads “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men (*anthropoi*).” According to the guidelines, rule A5, *anthropoi* can be rendered “people.” We could then revise the NIV to read “one mediator between God and people” and be within the guidelines. However, according to the same guidelines, rule A3, “human beings in general” should ordinarily be rendered by “man.” Why then if *anthropoi* can be rendered “people,” must we “ordinarily” render it “man”?

Furthermore, rendering the plural *anthropoi* as a singular (man) contradicts rule A2, “singulars are not to be changed to plurals” because “person and number should be retained in translation.” Is it unacceptable to change singulars to plurals, but acceptable to change plurals to singulars? And would we not better describe Christ Jesus as “the human” rather than “the man” because, by using *anthropos*, Paul wants to highlight that Jesus, as the mediator between God and humans, must represent females as well as males? But of course this move toward accuracy would mean contradicting rule A5, “the singular *anthropos* should ordinarily be translated ‘man’.” (Ironically, *anthropos* can even refer only to women, as in 1 Peter 3:4!)

A MISUNDERSTANDING OF GRAMMATICAL GENDER

What, exactly, is “grammatical gender”? Is it “natural gender,” as in sexuality? No, grammatical gender refers to “class” or “kind.” In Hebrew, a bereaved mother bear is described in the masculine gender (Hos 13:8). Sometimes the same reality can be described either in masculine or feminine gender categories (as I show in numerous examples in my book *The Goddess Revival*, pp. 122-125). The masculine noun *diakonos* refers to a female (Phoebe) while the Holy Spirit (*pneuma*), who is personal, takes a neuter article. “Teacher” (*gohelet*), a Hebrew feminine word, can refer to a man, Solomon (Eccl 1:1). The Greek word for “church” (*ekklesia*) is a feminine noun although it includes women and men (as in Philemon 2).

In contradiction to rule B1, *adelphoi*, although masculine in form, was intended by the original writers to include females, because it is used to include the women Lydia, Euodia, and Syntyche (Acts 16:40; Phil 4:1-2). *Huioi*, in contradiction to rule B2, was intended by the apostle Paul to include females as well as males (Gal 3:28, 4:6). Thus, the New International Reader’s Version is correct in rendering Galatians 4:6 “children.”

AN ATTEMPT TO USURP POWER

Since Focus on the Family’s guidelines are neither accurate nor consistent, it appears that their stated goal is not necessarily their true goal. Why would they “seek the leading of the Holy Spirit” by inviting ten people to their meeting of “concerned” individuals, the majority of whom share the same position on the issue (aligned with the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood)? Not one female Christian scholar was invited! To the most simple-minded observer, it appears more that *a priori* to the discussion, the winning agenda was one which enabled a certain type of men to “lord it over” others (Mark 10:42).

Further, how could some Christians have the breathtaking arrogance, not to mention the power, to demand other Christian organizations to publish only their point of view? Has the NIV remained free of “sectarian bias” as it originally desired? How could the creators of these guidelines be concerned about unity in evangelicalism, if they not only sought to suppress revision of the NIV for an American audience, but also sought to suppress publication of two existing inclusive-language versions of the NIV, even extending their meddling overseas by attempting to regulate the version being published in Europe?

Rendering the Bible accurately affects me and all women (over half of the church and the world). Being a woman in no way means that God has excluded me from God’s many blessings. Am I to be one of those to whom Paul would entrust all he said? Little girls who read *The Adventures in Odyssey Bible* might say, “Yes, Paul said, ‘You should teach

the same thing to some people you can trust’ (2 Tim 2:2). I am a person, and I pray to God that I might become trustworthy.” Since the Greek has the plural of *anthropos*, according to rule A5, the *Odyssey Bible* is correct and the present NIV is incorrect with “commit these to faithful men.” Thus, if Focus on the Family was listening to the Bible rather than trying to dictate to the Bible, its leaders should have demanded that the NIV Committee revise their 1984 edition into their 1996 New International Reader’s Version: “Pass on to people you can trust the things you’ve heard me say.”

The original International Bible Society decision of May 14 was a fair one—to have an inclusive and an exclusive version, in the best spirit of evangelicalism, wherein, given adherence to the sole lordship of Jesus Christ, believers can differ on a variety of nonsalvific topics like mode of baptism and nature of communion. The IBS should not have retreated from this position.

A MISUSE OF RESOURCES

Focus on the Family proudly lists on its June 3, 1997, news release that in twenty years it has garnered 3-5 million radio listeners. Many parishioners in my own church have benefited from Focus’ broadcasts and materials. Its initial, denominationally-inclusive stance has been its strength.

But at the Colorado Springs gathering, Focus and Zondervan Publishers offered to reimburse any purchaser offended by inclusive language used in the *Adventures in Odyssey Bible* and the *Kid’s Devotional Bible*. If readers take them seriously, Focus and Zondervan could spend up to nine million dollars reimbursing customers, in addition to the thousands of dollars spent already on editing these versions (an amount that could keep over 400,000 children alive for a month).¹ Instead of these dollars being spent to spread “light” and “truth” around the world, they will be used so that the female “people group” may hear that “all men” but *not* “all people” might believe! All this money and time will be expended so that not one more child should read “So God created human beings in his image” or that John “came to tell people about the Light. Through him all people could hear about the Light and believe.”

That the Church begins again to argue over “man” versus “people,” spending vast amounts of time and money to exclude references to half the world’s population, while millions of non-believing people stand dismayed and unimpressed with our misuse of resources, in my opinion shames the name of Christ.

¹ As of June 1997, Word has sold @197,000 hardcover and 29,000 paperback copies of the *Odyssey Bible* at a cost of @\$4,966,000. Zondervan has sold @164,000 NIRV children’s and adult’s Bibles at a cost of @\$3,600,000. World Vision charges @\$20/month to keep a child alive.

ANALYZING THE COLORADO SPRINGS GUIDELINES FOR TRANSLATION OF GENDER-RELATED LANGUAGE:

WHAT ARE THEY? WHERE DID THEY COME FROM? AND WHAT DO THEY REALLY MEAN? ¹

David R. Leigh

When a bomb goes off those behind the incident will usually take credit and publish a tract or manifesto to propagate their views. So it was in the latest chapter of the evangelical culture wars. On May 27, 1997, the International Bible Society (IBS) made a decision that exploded in controversy, and the real culprits behind the matter went to press proclaiming their point of view.

IBS's controversial decision was to pull a complete reversal of its stance on gender-inclusive language and its plans for future editions of translations and publications. It decided to rescind its plans for the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI) in the U.S. and to recall its inclusive New International Reader's Version (NIrV). Its president, Lars Dunberg, then signed a shocking set of gender-biased translation guidelines that were touted by some as a milestone agreement but considered by others to be a millstone around the neck of evangelical progress.

The creators of these guidelines were quick to claim responsibility for the explosive reversal and to announce their victory in print, first on the front page of the June 1997 *CBMW News*, published by the anti-egalitarian Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. They next published a two-page advertisement in the October 27, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today* (pp. 14-15), which asked, "Can I Still Trust My Bible?" This ad listed not only the guidelines intended to guard us from "diminishing" the accuracy of our translations, but listed five "authorized" versions readers can trust. The ad offered a free information packet, containing CBMW brochures and a 32-page booklet, *What's Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?*, written by CBMW President Wayne Grudem.

Included in this advertisement, however, was the admission that revisions to the May 1997 guidelines had already been necessary! Two of the original twelve signatures had also been dropped—those of Dunberg and Bruce Ryskamp, president of Zondervan. The most significant change involved a concession that when the Greek speaks of brothers in the plural (*adelphoi*), it can mean both brothers and sisters and therefore may be so translated. We can only hope proponents of these guidelines will come to see that their faulty reasoning on this point is

the same reasoning behind their other restrictions on inclusive translation.

On the heels of IBS's explosive May 27 announcement, the June 1997 *CBMW News* boasted of its team's success with a headline: "NIV controversy: participants sign landmark agreement." The lead article, by Wayne Grudem, described the steps they took to make the agreement happen. On the cover, seven participants most closely associated with CBMW and/or most instrumental in the final decision exhibited their beaming pride at the outcome of the Colorado Springs meeting in a group photo. But who were these "participants" and what did they participate in? The headline makes it sound as if they represented opposing views on the inclusive language issue. The opening sentence describes them as "twelve men with strongly differing views on a controversial issue," sounding as if something on the level of the SALT Accords happened here. Not so. Notice that no CBE members or prominent egalitarians were included. The majority present were CBMW-associated or representatives from similar organizations. They were CBMW members Grudem, Tim Bayly, John Piper and R.C. Sproul; Vern Poythress of Westminster Seminary; James Dobson, who called the meeting, and Charlie Jarvis, also of Focus on the Family; NIV Committee for Bible Translation (CBT) members Ken Barker and Ron Youngblood; Bruce Ryskamp, Zondervan Publishing House president and International Bible Society president Lars Dunberg (who did not re-enlist when the revision came around); and finally Joel Belz, publisher of *World* magazine, whose initial biased coverage of the NIVI prompted numerous ethics charges against the magazine by IBS and Zondervan. All of these men signed the controversial agreement, though only Dobson, Jarvis, Belz, Poythress, Piper, Grudem and Bayly stood together for the historic photograph.

CBMW News stated that "two hours before the meeting started, the International Bible Society had issued a press release that contained many of the very points we [CBMW] were prepared to request from them." In other words, this was not a jury of twelve men with strongly differing views; it was more like a kangaroo court organized to lynch scholarly work done by the CBT. That two CBT members sympathized with the agreement in no way legitimizes the guidelines.

Let us now take a closer look at this so-called "agreement" and then consider the CBMW defense, which

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crystallizes the essence of what the IBS capitulation involves.

The Colorado Springs Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture²

Adopted on May 27, 1997, by the International Bible Society; deletions in the September 9, 1997 Revision shown as crossed out, additions shown in bold print

A. Gender-related renderings of biblical language which we affirm:

1. The generic use of “he, him, his, himself” should be employed to translate generic 3rd person masculine singular pronouns in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. However substantival participles such as *ho pisteuon* can often be rendered in inclusive ways, such as “the one who believes” rather than “he who believes.”

2. Person and number should be retained in translation so that singulars are not changed to plurals and third-person statements are not changed to second-person or first-person statements, with only rare exceptions required in unusual cases.

3. “Man” should ordinarily be used to designate the human race ~~or human beings in general~~, for example in Genesis 1:26-27; 5:2; Ezekiel 29:11; and John 2:25.

4. Hebrew *’ish* should ordinarily be translated “man” and “men” and Greek *aner* should almost always be so translated.

5. In many cases, *anthropoi* refers to people in general, and can be translated “people” rather than “men.” The singular *anthropos* should ordinarily be translated “man” when it refers to a male human being.

6. Indefinite pronouns such as *tis* can be translated “anyone” rather than “any man.”

7. In many cases, pronouns such as *oudeis* can be translated “no one” rather than “no man.”

8. When *pas* is used as a substantive, it can be translated with terms such as “all people” or “everyone.”

9. The phrase “son of man” should ordinarily be preserved to retain intracanonical connections.

10. Masculine references to God should be retained.

B. Gender-related renderings which we will generally avoid, though there may be unusual exceptions in certain contexts:

1. “Brother” (*adelphos*) ~~and “brothers”~~ **should not be changed to “brother or sister”; however the plural (*adelphoi*) should not be changed to “brother(s) and sister(s)” can be translated brothers and sisters where the context makes clear that the author is referring to both men and women.**

2. “Son” (*huios, ben*) should not be changed to “child,” or “sons” (*hoioi*) to “children” or “sons and daughters.” (However, Hebrew *banim* often means “children.”)

3. “Father” (*pater, ’ab*) should not be changed to “parent,” or “fathers” to “parents” or “ancestors.”

C. We understand these guidelines to be representative and not exhaustive, **and that some details may need further refinement.**

FUNDAMENTAL PROBLEMS

The Colorado Springs guidelines treat the NIV as though it were a literal translation instead of the superior “dynamic equivalent” translation it is designed to be. Admittedly, some of the guidelines may be appropriate in literal translations or interlinear texts, which have strengths and weaknesses of their own, but these guidelines are inappropriate for a dynamic equivalent translation. Dynamic equivalent translators realize there are trade-offs to be made for the sake of clarity and accuracy; what they sacrifice in literalness (which can result in renderings not understandable in a receptor language) they more than gain in reproducing the author’s intent. As a dynamic equivalent translation, the NIVI (currently available only in the U.K.) overcomes the historical and cultural distance intrinsic to gender-laden language.

Sadly, the Colorado Springs guidelines fail to recognize the nature of the NIV’s own translational philosophy, which when carried out consistently *must* embrace gender inclusiveness. The guidelines also fail to recognize inclusive language as a legitimate receptor language for translation.

This “landmark agreement” did not represent a group of scholars wrestling with how to best translate God’s Word into a dynamic equivalent for modern readers. That had already happened when the CBT met years earlier and made plans to update and inclusify the NIV and related publications. What happened at the Colorado Springs meeting was that persons representing only one point of view (subordination of women) persuaded the CBT’s business partners to conform the NIV to that view.

WHAT ABOUT THE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES?

For the most part the guidelines beg the very issues at stake in this debate, as do the clearest defenses of these guidelines, written by Dr. Grudem. The first of these defenses appeared in CBMW News in June 1997. Another appeared in the October 27, 1997 issue of Christianity Today (pp. 27-32) and was essentially a condensed version of the CBMW News article. A third, What’s Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations, also by Grudem (32 pages), appears to be a reworked anti-New Revised Standard Version tract, updated to include elements of the preceding two articles.

Since Grudem’s article in CBMW News seems to be the key document rationalizing these guidelines, I will focus

primarily on it, noting significant insights to be gained from the other sources, and will consider these arguments in the order raised there by Dr. Grudem.

On page 3 of *CBMW News*, Grudem begins with the question, “What were some specific problems with the inclusive language translations?” His list begins: “First, the loss of the generic ‘he, him, his’.” Grudem states that eliminating generic masculine pronouns in inclusive translations has “obscured the personal application of Scripture to the individual” when singular statements are translated into plural statements. A statement like, “I will come and eat with *him*” now becomes “...eat with *them*.” This, Grudem says, is less personal because it implies a corporate meal rather than a personal one. Grudem quotes this and similar passages to justify guidelines A1 and A2, which endorse the generic use of “he, him, his” and which prohibit changing gender or number when translating Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek pronouns, “with only rare exceptions required in unusual cases.” (Significantly, Grudem himself acknowledges these rules cannot be applied consistently!) But even if we could stretch our imaginations to think that pluralizing is depersonalizing, would this really be worse than implying that Christ was speaking primarily and preferably to men?

After all, do we assume we must be part of a corporate assembly when Isaiah 40:31 says that “*those* who hope in the Lord will renew *their* strength. *They* will soar on wings like eagles; *they* will run and not grow weary, *they* will walk and not be faint”? Don’t we rather assume this means each of us, and not just those who do it in groups? Of course. The same can be said for John 3:16. No one would be taken seriously who argued that “God so loved the world” means he only loved us collectively and not individually or personally.

What’s more, it is hard to understand why, if Grudem feels it is so important to retain the personal impact of such verses, he would not allow the dynamic equivalent translation of these statements into the second person, e.g., “I will come and eat with you”? His objection to this is that it “restricts the sentence to the readers... rather than keeping it universal.”³ If this is so, then I suppose we have all been presumptuous in applying to ourselves statements like “It is by grace *you* have been saved through faith” (Eph 2:8). Apparently this is not a universally applicable statement because Paul used the word “you.” We must then restrict Paul’s meaning to the Ephesians only.

Grudem makes similar objections to translations that inclusify by substituting “we.” “We”, he says, restricts the meaning to the speaker and hearers.⁴ But what about Romans 5:1, “we have been justified by faith”—did this teaching apply only to Paul and the Roman Christians fortunate enough to receive his letter?

However, pluralizing generic masculine singular pronouns does no actual harm to their personal impact or intended meaning, and can accurately convey the author’s

intent. Grudem’s rejection of such translations is unreasonable. Guidelines A1 and A2 are unsuitable for a dynamic equivalent translation.

Grudem goes on to insist that the generic use of “he, him, and his” continues to be acceptable in English today, citing examples of such usage in current dictionaries, stylebooks, and secular journals, and by a few contemporary skeptics who doubt that English will ever fully make the transition to true inclusivity. No one doubts there are still remnants of the literary world that do not use inclusive language, but the question is why a dynamic equivalent translation would deliberately ignore contemporary English generic usage.

Grudem turns next in his analysis to the question, “What if women feel excluded?” His answer is puzzling. He says, in effect, if they feel excluded, they just shouldn’t! After all, people “easily... learn hundreds of variations in different dialects.” Women, he says, should be *taught* that “such usage does *not* in fact ‘exclude women’.”⁵ But if women really haven’t been left out of the meaning of the text, then what is wrong with translating that text into the correct dynamic equivalent to express this reality with clarity?

Most remarkable, however, is Dr. Grudem’s *own* admission that masculine phraseology in the ancient languages was not intended to exclude women. For years he and his colleagues have declared that, based on the fact that the original languages used masculine terms to describe certain ministries and/or people who filled those roles, the Scriptures do indeed exclude women from those roles. Now Grudem suddenly declares: “the original author did not intend such an exclusive meaning, the translators did not intend such an exclusive meaning, and that is not the meaning the words have when interpreted rightly in their contexts.”⁶ This remarkable statement thus begs the question: Will he (and his colleagues) cease to exclude women from ordination and from positions of pastor, elder, and deacon—since he himself can no longer claim that the text excludes women based on masculine phraseology in the original languages?

Grudem’s next concern regards “The name ‘man’ for the human race,” which provides the basis for guideline A3, requiring translators to use the term “man” when the text means humanity, human beings, or the human race.⁷

The question a dynamic equivalent translator must ask is, “What does this word mean in its context and how can I render it into my receptor language in a way that best communicates that original intent to my people group?” If the word *‘adam* means “the human race,” then regardless of any “male overtones” in the original language, it should be translated to communicate its intended meaning.⁸

However, Grudem insists on using “man” for *‘adam* and expands his argument as follows:

1. Terms like “*humankind*, *human beings*, and *human* are not names that can refer to man in distinction from

woman, and thus they are less accurate translations of *'adam'* than the word *man*. The male overtones of the Hebrew word are lost."⁹

2. That God named the race *man* "suggests some male headship in the race." Since both the man and the woman had to share the husband's name, Grudem and his colleagues infer male leadership. Abandoning the use of a male-gender-specific word for the human race would discourage this conclusion by English readers.¹⁰

3. Grudem wants us to consider, "What if these... 'patriarchal' elements in Scripture are part of what the Holy Spirit intended to be there? If we hold to the absolute divine authority of Scripture, then we should not seek to mute the content that the Holy Spirit caused to be there."¹¹

These three points are very illuminating. Point 1 tells us that, to Grudem, although a word in its context may mean humans in general, it is more important to retain its male overtones than to translate it in a way that clearly conveys its primary meaning, even if those overtones will create confusion and mislead some readers to think that they or those they love may be excluded, or that they are secondary participants.¹²

In points 2 and 3, Grudem argues for *implied* headship and a *possible* patriarchy of the Spirit. The concern of point 1 is for the loss of accuracy, which Grudem thinks requires retaining overtones. But is not accuracy the very issue at question and might not overtones actually be misleading?

Why should translators accept guidelines based on inferences and possibilities that are not clear to everyone—especially when it *is* clear that, in generic contexts, *'adam'* means humanity. Any departure from what is clear only clouds accuracy. If we follow Grudem's guidelines, we lose the primary meaning of inclusion—which all agree *'adam'* possesses when referring to the race. But if we translate inclusively, all we lose are the inferences that "complementarians" read into this word but which are not explicitly in the text. Grudem himself admits these inferences are not essential to the meaning of the text when he calls them "overtones."¹³

My suggestion is this. Let translators translate what is clear, and when it comes to theories based on possible inferred meanings, do what pastors and exegetes have always done to explore nuances in the ancient texts: Engage people in word studies. Such studies are rightly reserved for preaching and teaching that goes beyond the primary, central and obvious meaning captured by translators. Such studies will continue to be required regardless of how the gender-inclusive question is settled.

Dr. Grudem next raises some issues that *could* have been argued effectively. He asks the questions, "Should men be called men?" and "Should Jesus be called a man?" It does appear that one of the NIVI editors may have gotten carried away with the search-and-replace feature on the team's word processor. At times, people who were clearly

men (Jesus included) have been re-described in the NIVI using neutral terms. For example, in the NIVI "man of the Pharisees" became "a Pharisee," the "men with Jesus" became the "disciples" with Jesus, and so on. However, not all of these changes are bad. Some, like the change to "a Pharisee," actually make the writing crisper and more concise.¹⁴

In addition, might it not be legitimate for a dynamic equivalence translator to ask if the genders of those involved hold any significance for the meaning of a given text in a given receptor language? Sometimes it may be important that a person in a particular story was male or female; other times it may be irrelevant and only hinder the reader from identifying with the point of the passage.

In the case of Jesus, it certainly would be wrong to conceal intentionally the historical fact that he took on a male body, or the theological fact that he is the eternal Son of God.¹⁵ However, regardless of what "complementarians" may read into the "overtones" they perceive, the point of speaking about God and Christ with personal pronouns is not that those pronouns are masculine, but that they are personal. The point of Jesus' incarnation was not that he became a male but that he took on full humanity. The so-called "scandal of particularity" in the incarnation involves the fact that Jesus not only became human but he also became a male human, a Jew, a Roman subject, a Galilean, a person of the first-century, a carpenter, of the tribe of Judah, and so on. Sometimes some of these aspects of Jesus' identity bear more significance to a text and its context than others. Translators need to consider how these specifics will be understood by the receptor group. Sometimes, what's really most significant is that Jesus was human. In such cases, gender-specific language may only cloud the real issue the author wanted to communicate. A dynamic equivalence translator may therefore prefer an inclusive rendering. To Grudem this seems as if "the masculinity of Jesus [is] downplayed."¹⁶ In actuality, the message of Jesus' actions and his humanity are heightened.

These concerns form Grudem's basis for guidelines A4 and 5, which require certain Hebrew and Greek words traditionally rendered "men" and "man" to "almost always" and "ordinarily" be translated in the masculine. However, his qualifiers suggest Grudem and his colleagues recognize that even these words, which they feel are so clearly masculine, do not always behave the way they would like them to behave. This suggests the words are in fact more inclusive and flexible than Grudem and company want to admit.

Interestingly, many of the examples Grudem himself cites in favor of guidelines A4 and 5 could also be used to argue against him. For example, Grudem criticizes the inclusification of 2 Peter 1:21, which refers to Old Testament prophets ("men" in NIV; "human" in the NIVI). Aware that verse 20 refers to written prophecy, Grudem

concludes that since no known written prophet of the Old Testament was a woman, there is no point in inclusifying this text. But verse 21 goes on to speak of and include *spoken* prophecies. Certainly we know of female prophets in both testaments and some of their “spoken” prophecies are recorded for us and therefore *are* written Scripture (e.g. 2 Ki 22:14-20; 2 Chr 34:22-28). An inclusive rendering is therefore quite justified. Likewise, Grudem objects to changing Paul’s statement, “when I became a man” to “when I became an adult” (1 Cor 13:11). Yet this rendering is far more effective and has the advantage of maintaining consistency with Paul’s earlier phrase: “when I was a child.”

Next Grudem explains the limited endorsement given by the guidelines to specific “*legitimate uses of inclusive language*,” by discussing guidelines A5, 6, 7 and 8.¹⁷ It is only fair to point out that in a letter to Christianity Today, Grudem and his colleagues complained about being called “inclusive language opponents” and expressed disappointment at not being given credit for including *six* guidelines “that approved certain kinds of inclusive language which can retain accuracy in translation.”¹⁸ Some of the guidelines do indeed allow for inclusive speech, and this is even more true since the September 1997 revision. But in CBMW News, Grudem himself highlights only four, not six, and these are under the section entitled, “Gender-related renderings of biblical language which we affirm” (emphasis added).¹⁹

When inclusivity is allowed by the guidelines, however, it is sometimes with a curious emphasis that lends itself to ambiguity and inconsistency. For example, guideline A5, says, “In many cases, *anthropoi* refers to people in general, and can be translated ‘people’ rather than ‘men.’ The singular *anthropos* should ordinarily be translated ‘man’ *when it refers to a male human being*” (emphasis added). But why should the singular be so translated? (In the words of Grudem’s colleague John Piper, “the Greek *anthropos* regularly signifies ‘person’ not ‘male’.”²⁰ Another of Grudem’s colleagues, Andreas Kostenberger, writing in the same issue of CBMW News, affirms that “*anthropos*, especially in the plural, may refer to people including men and women.”²¹ Why then, we wonder, does the guideline make it sound as if the “ordinary” meaning is “male”? Meanwhile, the Hebrew singular ‘*adam*, which is the functional Hebrew equivalent of *anthropos*, is described as sometimes referring to people in general, yet the guidelines *require* it to be rendered “man.” There seems to be real inconsistency here.

Furthermore, in guidelines A6, 7, and 8, several masculine pronouns are said to refer to people in general and therefore are allowed to be translated that way. Although Grudem wants credit for making this concession, he misses the very point of our contention. Inclusivists argue that in *all* cases where masculine pronouns and speech *mean* to include both genders, then in *all those* cases it is *more accurate* to translate accordingly. How is it that in the

examples of A6, 7, and 8, it is permissible to translate inclusively, despite “overtones,” because that’s what the text means, while in the other cases it is *not* permissible *even though* that is what the text means? Grudem and his colleagues have yet to offer a reasonable explanation for this kind of arbitrary imposition of obviously male-biased preferences on the translated text.

Grudem resumes his discussion of the guidelines by moving on to A9, which seeks to retain use of the phrase “Son of Man,” and A10, which retains masculine references to God. Since the NIVI makes no effort to change masculine references to God (nor does any major inclusive language translation now available), guideline A10 appears to be either a preemptive strike or a cheap shot. Since it does not pertain to the NIVI, though, it is even less relevant than the rest of the guidelines and does not merit further discussion at this juncture.²²

Section B of the guidelines pertains to “gender-related renderings which we will generally avoid, though there may be unusual exceptions in certain contexts.” Again there is ambiguity regarding “unusual exceptions in certain contexts.” But that aside, let’s look at inappropriate translations according to this section in the September revision:

- adding “and sister” where the word for “brother” appears in the singular (B1)
- changing “son(s)” to “child(ren)” or to “sons and daughters” (B2)—even though the plural of sons in Hebrew often means that
- changing “father(s)” to “parent(s)” or “ancestor(s)” (B3)

Grudem defended the original guidelines by arguing that *adelphoi* could only be translated “brothers” and not “brothers and sisters.”²³ But in the same paragraph, he went on to admit that the term refers in actuality to all Christians! What then is wrong with a dynamic equivalent translation reflecting that fact? Grudem never really answered that, other than to plea for “accuracy.” But what made it inaccurate? Nothing! Again, his concern was merely to preserve “male overtones.” Thankfully he and his cohorts later discovered examples from ancient extrabiblical texts that show the term *adelphoi* can mean “brothers and sisters.” In What’s Wrong, Grudem cites four extrabiblical examples that explain the reason for their conceding this point and revising their guidelines accordingly.²⁴ Even so, after defending the revision, and himself admitting the inaccuracy of rendering the word as “brothers,” he expresses sympathy toward and claims to “understand” and “respect” those who choose to continue translating that way so they won’t appear to be complying with “feminist culture.”²⁵

But while conceding an inclusive translation of the plural *adelphoi*, the guidelines continue to oppose inclusifying its singular form. According to Grudem, in the passage “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him” (Mt 18:15), “brother” cannot be translated “brother

or sister.” Are we to infer then, that the rules are different for how we behave toward our sisters? Does Jesus not *mean* “brother or sister”? Is it now acceptable to be angry with our sister and call her “Raca” or “You fool” (Mt 5:22)? Are we to forgive our brother seven times seventy times, but not our sister (Mt 18:21-22)? Obviously, to require this kind of treatment of the singular *adelphos* is to require a puzzling commitment to inaccuracy in a dynamic equivalent translation.

Likewise, Grudem points out that the Greek has a separate gender-neutral word for children (*tekna*) that the New Testament authors often used, but which at other times did not use, choosing instead to speak of all believers as “sons.”²⁴ Grudem rightly points out the potential significance attached to “sonship” when and where this happens. Grudem explains that in Christ “we all (men *and* women) gain standing as ‘sons’ and therefore the inheritance rights that belong to sons in the Biblical world.” This is a significant point that might get lost by replacing “sons” with “children” in some cases. On the other hand, in a culture like ours that no longer attaches the same inheritance rights to the masculine gender, the word “children” actually carries the intended meaning more effectively.

Surprisingly though, Grudem himself admits that in Christ, women inherit the same rights as men. Presumably, therefore, if women are now to be treated as sons and have *all* the same “full rights of sons” (Gal 4:5), then certainly women must be entitled to do everything a son has the right to do!

So this brings us back to that nagging question: If in fact “sons” *means* to include women, as Dr. Grudem so adamantly asserts, then why complain when it is translated accordingly? After all, the NIV, NIV, and NIVI are intended to be *dynamic equivalence translations*, presenting what the text means in the receptor language.

CONCLUSION

Grudem ends his booklet *What’s Wrong* with a long caution about those who would control our minds by means of Orwellian manipulation of a society’s vocabulary.²⁵

Grudem is correct that language shapes how we think. But how we think also shapes language. Translation is not a mechanical substitution of receptor-language words for ancient-language words. It involves the translator in understanding both the ancient text and the modern context into which a text must speak. The translator must be able to distinguish between denotation and connotation, what is clear and what is an incidental, possibly misleading, “overtone.”

While it is clear that Grudem and his colleagues are genuinely concerned that the Bible be translated accurately,

we must sadly conclude that for all their zeal they have failed to separate its intended meanings from their own presuppositions about masculinity and femininity. By means of these guidelines, they have sought to perpetuate restrictions on women and on language that are neither biblical nor accurate.

Finally, with regard to section C, “We understand these guidelines to be representative and not exhaustive,” my comment is that the guidelines may be representative, but not of dynamic equivalence translations! The revision adds, “some details may need further refinement.” To this we give a hearty “Amen!”

1 In a recent response to my article, “Am I Wrong Because I’m Politically Correct” ([the standard](#), Baptist General Conference, October 1997, pp. 14-15), Dr. John Piper mistook my condemnation of name calling and labeling as an allusion to the sensationalized treatment *World* magazine gave to this topic (“Why Inclusive Language Bible Translations Give Me Pause,” [the standard](#), January/February 1997, BGC [yet to appear]). He then went on to call me “disingenuous” for calling the so-called “complementarian” view sexist, immoral and on the same level with racism, while I at the same time called upon readers to “dialogue on issues like this without name-calling, labeling or adhering to points of view simply because of the prominent personalities associated with them.” My point was that people who reject a view because it’s labeled “politically correct” seem to be doing so just because they don’t want to be associated with cultural liberalism; they are not considering whether or not in this case the politically correct thing is truly correct.

2 Original guidelines reprinted from *CBMW News*, vol. 2, no. 3, June 1997, p. 6; revisions taken from “Can I Still Trust My Bible?” (advertisement, *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1997, pp. 14-15) and *What’s Wrong with Gender-Neutral Bible Translations?* by Wayne Grudem, pp. 28-29 (1997 CBMW)

3 Grudem, “Do Inclusive Language Bibles Distort Scripture? Yes,” *Christianity Today*, October 27, 1997, p. 31

4 *Ibid.*

5 *CBMW News*, p. 4

6 People, Grudem says, can learn this “in a moment”—although, I might add, it seems to take some people decades to catch on, Grudem and company included. Even so, Grudem is emphatic: “we have all been told a lie—for it is a lie that such usage is ‘exclusive.’” And who told us this lie? Incredibly, Grudem points at the feminists!

7 In his *CBMW News* article he gave no real reason for this, other than noting that the singular collective Hebrew noun, ‘*adam*’ “has male overtones,” is sometimes used for Adam the person, and of man in distinction from woman. To this, we can only ask, “So what?”

Grudem’s only point seems to be that we should do it this way because that’s the way we’ve always done it—and if we stop doing it, men will no longer seem to represent the sum of humanity.

- The translator is not, and should not be, under any obligation to reproduce any misleading connotations unfortunately attached to a word by “overtones.” Nor are translators obligated to retain such incidental elements in order to accommodate possible questionable interpretations that would be preempted by inclusive accuracy.
- 8 In his article “Why Inclusive Language Bible Translations Give Me Pause,” the standard, January/February 1997, BGC (yet to appear), John Piper argues that inclusive language translations preempt possible patriarchal interpretations. Therefore, he thinks translators should retain masculine overtones of the original languages as a courtesy to his views.
 - 9 Grudem, “Yes” p. 28. See also What’s Wrong, p. 7ff.
 - 10 Ibid.; see also Piper, “Pause”
 - 11 Grudem, “Yes” p. 28. See also What’s Wrong, p. 7ff.
 - 12 Although men cannot make exclusive claim to the title human (quite an admission on Grudem’s part), nevertheless English should follow Hebrew, he says, in calling all humans “men” and all humanity “man.” Why? First because the Hebrew says that’s what God did. But we have to ask: was the point of this to place the woman under her husband, or was it to remind a primitive and patriarchal culture that women too are partners in the same humanity? Grudem assumes the former. We assume the latter.
 - 13 Again we wonder if Grudem has not betrayed his real motives. Is it really accuracy he’s after or does he want to obscure and “mute” the primary and essential meanings of ancient words in order to safeguard his own biased interpretations of word connotations? This really is the choice. He and his colleagues, by their own admission, want to build a case on peripheral “overtones” that will be lost in the transition to gender-accurate translation in the receptor language.
 - 14 In other cases though, it looks as if an NIVI editor unnecessarily felt the need to conceal the gender of people involved! If this is true, then there is certainly more work to be done on the NIVI before it should be released in the U.S. But the CBT knew that and was still busy working on its revision at the time this controversy exploded.
 - 15 I use the term “eternal Son of God” despite the fact that CBMW board of reference member John MacArthur teaches to the contrary. As opposed to historic Trinitarianism, MacArthur writes of Jesus in his commentary on Hebrews 1:4-5: “He was not the son until He was born into this world through the virgin birth.” MacArthur wrongly believes the title “eternal Son” traps one into making Jesus eternally subservient to God. But he rightly considers eternal subservience a heresy. (See The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Hebrews (Moody, 1983), on Hebrews 1:4-5, pp. 23-24.) Ironically, Grudem does believe Jesus is eternally subservient to God. For more on the departure of Grudem, John Piper and others in the gender-exclusionary camp from historical Trinitarianism, see Gilbert Bilezikian, “Historical Bungee-Jumping: Subordination in the Godhead,” Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society (JETS), 40/1 (March 1997) 57-68.
 - 16 CBMW News, p. 4
 - 17 Ibid., p. 5
 - 18 Tim Bayly, Joel Belz, James Dobson, Wayne Grudem, Charles Jarvis, Vern Poythress, R. C. Sproul, “Letters to the Editor,” Christianity Today, October 6, 1997, p. 14
 - 19 The guidelines that most clearly do allow for some forms of inclusive language translation are: parts of A1 and 5 and all of guidelines A6, 7, and 8, totaling five. Plus, guidelines A2 and B2 allow for some “exceptions.” And B1 has been revised to be slightly more inclusive. While we welcome any guidelines that contain a sensible approach to inclusivity—and only guidelines A6, 7, and 8 do this without mixing in other, anti-inclusive elements—these few allowances are hardly enough to exempt these men from being called “inclusive language opponents.”
 - 20 Piper, “Pause”
 - 21 Andreas J. Kostenberger, “The neutering of ‘man’ in the NIVI,” CBMW News, June 1997, p. 11
 - 22 Retaining the phrase “Son of Man,” however, is a subject deserving more attention than Grudem or the NIVI translators have given to it. I admit I too winced when I read Psalm 8:4 in the NIVI, in preparation for a preaching series recently: “What are *mere mortals*, that you are mindful of them, *human beings* that you care for them?” The problem here is that this passage has clear messianic connections in the minds of New Testament authors. And the title “Son of Man” is one Jesus was fond of using for himself as a kind of messianic title. It is also a phrase sometimes used by the prophets of the prophets or of others.

However, the gender guidelines argue that “Son of Man” needs to “be preserved to retain intracanonical connections.” The obvious problem with this rationale, and Grudem offers no other, is that intracanonical connections could also be retained by creating an appropriate replacement phrase and using it consistently. There are a number of other issues Grudem could have raised concerning this phrase, but surprisingly didn’t. One is that Jesus is and was a son, not just a child. He was also a man, not just a human. These facts could argue in favor of retaining the phrase.

Conversely, there are several issues to consider that might argue against it. One is that Jesus was born of a woman and had no earthly father. In other words, his humanity derived entirely from a woman. Although he is the son of men by extension, just as he is the son of David by extension, the term, son of man, clearly does not mean he is the direct biological son of a man, meaning a male. Rather, the phrase is clearly messianic and intended to drive home the reality of Jesus’ human nature. In this light, “son of humanity” or “child of humanity” might actually best convey the theological meaning of the phrase from an incarnational perspective. Whatever the dynamic equivalent is for this particular phrase, the solution offered by, and the rationale behind, guideline A9 are clearly inadequate.
 - 23 What’s Wrong, p. 16
 - 24 CBMW News, p. 5
 - 25 What’s Wrong, pp. 24-27

CHRISTIANS FOR BIBLICAL EQUALITY

CBE is an organization of Christians who believe that the Bible, properly interpreted, teaches the fundamental equality of men and women of all racial and ethnic groups, all economic classes, and all age groups, based on the teachings of Galatians 3:28: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

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