

APPENDIX 2:

Report from the Committee on Bible Translation¹

Dear brothers,

Greetings in the Lord.

We submit to you our report in fulfillment of the mandate given to us by General Synod Abbotsford 1995. We are pleased to announce that we have completed our mandate and that we may confirm the recommendation made to Synod Abbotsford.

1 Mandate

Our Committee had received as mandate from General Synod Abbotsford 1995 the following charge:

To continue the Committee on Bible Translation which would receive comments from churches and/or members about passages in the NIV in need of improvement, scrutinize those comments, and pass on valid concerns to the NIV Translation Center. The Committee should also glean from previous Synod reports as well as from the Report and its appendices any recommendations for change which need to be presented to the NIV Translation Center. The letters which were sent to Synod

¹ The original report contained the following appendices:

1. Gleanings from Reports to Previous Synods
2. Analysis of Passages Cited in Letters to General Synod 1995
3. Analysis of Passages Cited in Correspondence after Synod 1995
4. Letter to Eleven Inquiring Churches, August 16, 1975
5. Press Release of CBT in *Clarion*, January 24, 1997
6. Press Release of CBT in *Clarion*, July 25, 1997
7. Press Release of the International Bible Society, May 27, 1997
8. E-mail from Mr. S. Johnson, July 25, 1997
9. Recommendations Addressed to the NIV Translation Center

expressing concerns about certain Bible passages should also be sent to the Committee. (Acts, Article 72)

This mandate assigned to the Committee contains the responsibility of passing on valid concerns about the NIV text to the NIV Translation Center. According to the mandate, the concerns may come from any of three sources:

- i. from past reports of the Committee,
- ii. from letters sent to Synod which contain concerns about certain Bible passages,
- iii. from correspondence from churches and/or members.

2 Meetings of the Committee

In order to fulfil this mandate, the Committee met nine times. However, nearly every agenda for these meetings included, or was even dominated by a matter, which was not part of the above quoted mandate: the publication of an inclusive version of the NIV. This matter demanded a great deal of time from the Committee and distracted us from pursuing the original mandate. We are pleased, nevertheless, to report that we are confident that we have done justice to all the responsibilities assigned to us by General Synod Abbotsford 1995.

3 Passing On Valid Concerns about the NIV Text to the NIV Translation Center

3.1 From Past Reports of the Committee

The Committee has gleaned through reports which have been submitted to previous Synods for relevant discussions on the NIV text. This investigation can be found in "Gleanings from Previous Synod Reports" (Appendix 1) As a result of this investigation, five areas of significance were identified and have been brought to the attention of the NIV Translation Center for minor changes to the text.

3.2 From Letters sent to Synod

The committee was given copies of 17 letters related to the NIV, twelve from individual churches and five from members. Of these, five letters expressed concern about specific passages in the NIV, and therefore, required our attention. Attached to the letter from the Immanuel Canadian Reformed Church, Edmonton, Alberta, were two articles. While the first article was written by a minister within our federation of Churches, the second was not, therefore, we did not deal with it. Our assessment of these five letters are contained in the study entitled, "Analysis of Passages Cited in Letters Submitted to General Synod Abbotsford, 1995" (Appendix 2). As a result of this study, we were able to make five recommendations for minor revisions to the printing of the NIV text.

(Appendix 2). As a result of this study, we were able to make five recommendations for minor revisions to the printing of the NIV text.

3.3 From Correspondence from Churches and/or Members

Only one item of correspondence from Churches and/or members containing specific concerns about the NIV text was received by the Committee. It was a paper containing the main points of an address which Dr. J. De Jong had delivered to one of the churches and which he had subsequently sent to us. Our assessment of the concerns expressed in that paper are contained in "Analysis of Passages Cited in Correspondence after Synod 1995" (Appendix 3). There were no matters arising from this study that persuaded us to address the NIV Translation Center for textual changes to future editions of the NIV.

4 Events Subsequent to Synod Abbotsford

4.1 Inclusive Language

In the Committee Report to General Synod Abbotsford 1995, no indication was given that the International Bible Society was contemplating the publication of an inclusive language edition of the NIV. That Committee was entirely unaware of such developments. It was of the persuasion that the International Bible Society was biased against inclusive language, as evidenced by one of the draft text studies on Psalm 121 where it was observed that while KJV, RSV, NASB and NKJV all offer a gender neutral translation, "thy / your children", the NIV has chosen to translate the Hebrew in a gender specific fashion, "your sons".² That Committee had assumed then, that inclusive language was a non-issue in relation to the NIV.

At the very first meeting of the present Committee, the secretary was requested to confirm whether there was any substance to the rumour that an inclusive language edition of the NIV was being published. Inclusive language remained a matter of major concern for us for two years of our mandate (from October 4/95 to July 17/97). This had the following effect: First, it demanded much of our energy, requiring several lengthy exchanges of letters with various bodies to secure and to confirm information so that we could inform the churches of this unexpected development. Secondly, it cast into doubt the meaningfulness of the Committee pursuing its mandate.

4.2 Correspondence

² This discussion was only part of a draft proposal. It was thought to be insignificant and therefore, it was dropped before it was adopted by the Committee. That is why this discussion is not found in the 1995 Report to General Synod.

The rumoured projection of an inclusive language NIV was clearly a matter of great concern to the churches. At our meeting of June 19, 1996 we had received unofficial inquiries from ten different churches about this matter and an official inquiry (via letter) from one of the churches. Although the matter of inclusive language was not, as such, a part of the mandate of this Committee, we chose to deal with it because it could not have been predicted by Synod 1995 and because it concerned the continued use of the NIV by the churches. We responded to these inquiries with a letter to the eleven churches (see Appendix 4). For the next five months, we sought sufficient information to issue a press release regarding the current status of an impending inclusive edition of the NIV and the future availability of the current form of the NIV. The Press Release was published in Clarion on January 24, 1997 (see Appendix 5).

Many of the churches were still very concerned. We received three more official inquiries from different churches about the direction of the NIV and the International Bible Society. However, the International Bible Society unexpectedly announced on May 27, 1997 that it had decided to terminate the whole inclusive language project (see Appendix 7). After reviewing the matter ourselves, we published a press release to inform the churches of this latest development on July 25, 1997 (see Appendix 6).

4.3 Enduring Meaningfulness of the Committee's Mandate

From the first meeting on, the Committee has been seeking to ascertain whether its work for textual improvements to the NIV will have any positive effect for the churches. There were two reasons why the Committee sought clarification. First, the Executive Director of the NIV Translation Center, Dr. K.L. Barker had assured the former Committee that the NIV Translation Center was planning a light, but complete revision of the NIV early in the 21st Century. We were confident, then, that our work would be meaningful for this upcoming revision. When it became known that the revision was to be a gender-inclusive one, and that the revision had already been completed in the United Kingdom, it seemed that it was too late to make any contributions to its text. Even if it were not too late, it was questionable whether we would be interested in participating in improving an inclusive language edition.

When the IBS issued its press release on May 27, 1997, it also announced the cancellation of the whole inclusive language project. Significantly, this Press Release announced: "There are no plans for a further revised edition" (for the full text of this Press Release, see Appendix 7). This is the second reason why we should inquire whether our work still had any meaningfulness. In response to further inquiries, we learned that "the 1984 text [of the NIV] will remain in distribution indefinitely. However this does not preclude the normal refining process that the NIV and all translations go through in the interest of increasing accuracy, and responding to critical analysis." When we pressed the IBS

to explain the difference between "normal refining process and "a new edition", we learned the following:

The refining process has always been based on the critiques of scholars, linguists and theologians who occasionally have comments about particular verbiage or verses. Those critiques are taken under advisement and if valid, are incorporated into the text during the next printing. A new edition, however, is a process in which the CBT evaluates the entire text for the purpose of increasing accuracy or updating a particular component of the text. IBS has agreed that we will not engage in a revision process of the 1984 text, but ongoing critiques of the text will be taken into consideration as has always been the case with the NIV.³

This information allowed the Committee, for the first time since its initial meeting, to fulfill its mandate with the assurance that its work might have some enduring meaningfulness for the churches.

5 Conclusion

In the light of the latest developments in the IBS, we are pleased to report that we can wholeheartedly confirm the recommendation of the former Committee on Bible Translations, and the decision made in Article 72 of the Acts of General Synod Abbotsford 1995. We have made nine recommendations to the NIV Translation Center (Appendix 9 contains a copy of our recommendation to the NIV Translation Center), and we can only wait to see if they will be incorporated into a future printing of the NIV. In grappling with the inclusive language issue, it was observed that if General Synod thought it necessary to appoint a new committee, it should include a member with expertise in English linguistics.

Respectfully submitted by your committee,

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J. Geertsema
W. Smouter
C. Van Dam

³ Excerpt from an e-mail message dated Friday, July 25, 1997 from Mr. Steve Johnson, Director of Communications of the IBS, to Mr. William Smouter. For the full text of this e-mail, see Appendix # 8.