

**Reports to
General Synod Smithers
2007**

Committee on Bible Translation

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Appendix A: Preliminary Study of the ESV.

**Committee on Bible Translation
Report to General Synod Smithers 2007**

1.0 Introduction

General Synod Chatham 2004 gave our Committee the following mandate:

1. To do a preliminary investigation of the ESV, and provide Synod 2007 with a report on the ESV translation, using also the input solicited from the churches;
2. To receive comments from churches and/or members about passages in the NIV in need of improvements;
3. To scrutinize these comments, and pass on valid concerns to the NIV Translation Centre;
4. To monitor developments in case significant changes appear in the text of the NIV;
5. To report and make recommendations regarding new Bible translations, whether they are worthy of investigation;
6. To serve the next General Synod with a report to be sent to the churches at least six months prior to the beginning of Synod. (Acts, Art. 78.5.)

During the last two and a half years, your committee made abundant use of email to pursue its mandate. Occasionally members met with each other, but not as a whole, due mainly to distance, logistics and uncertainties regarding budget and expenses. We have been quite busy, especially with our mandate to do a preliminary investigation of the English Standard Version (ESV). Your committee understood the word “preliminary” in distinction from a “full” investigation. As a *preliminary* investigation, we determined to see whether the ESV met its own stated goal of improving over the Revised Standard Version (RSV). If the ESV could not meet that basic test, then it certainly would not merit a *full* investigation since the RSV itself is no longer recommended for use in the churches (General Synod 1995, Acts, Art. 72. IV.D.)

In the summer of 2004 we sent out a request to the churches for input on the ESV. At the same time we ourselves undertook an independent study comparing the ESV with the RSV. The ESV is essentially a revision of the RSV, making changes to it in about 6% of the text. One of our key concerns, then, was whether the ESV is a sufficient improvement to the RSV. Has it addressed the glaring deficiencies in

the RSV as pointed out by previous Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) reports? We were also helped by the suggestion of Dr. C. Van Dam and of Burlington Ebenezer to read a review of the ESV by Dr. Allan Chapple.¹

We also received several suggestions about texts in the NIV in need of improvement which we have evaluated.

2.0 Preliminary Investigation of the ESV

2.1 The Committee's Study

The ESV is a revision of the RSV and sees itself as “carrying forward this legacy [of the RSV] for a new century.”² The committee, therefore, compared the ESV with the RSV, making use of the data and criteria found in the 1995 Report of the Committee on Bible Translations. This report relies on two earlier evaluations of the RSV, the 1974 and 1977 CBT Reports, and so these also were consulted. For our complete examination, see Appendix A.

On the positive side, your committee noted that the ESV:

- a. has moved words which had been inappropriately footnoted in the RSV to the main text, thus establishing the authentic Word of God more clearly to the reader
- b. recognizes the personhood of the Holy Spirit where the RSV did not
- c. has a much greater respect for the Masoretic Text than the RSV
- d. has a greater respect for the unity of Scripture, although in one instance mentioned in previous reports, namely Deuteronomy 32:43, the ESV is worse than the RSV and follows a reading from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Septuagint (see Appendix A, 2.1.1.1.d)
- e. does not use “thee” or “thou” and thus avoids both unnecessary archaic terminology and issues surrounding the divinity of Christ. (The RSV did not always use these pronouns in respect to the Lord Jesus.)
- f. shows a greater support for the divinity of our Lord than the RSV. Consider the punctuation of the ESV in Romans 9:5: “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.”
- g. is conscious of unscriptural, liberal influence in the RSV and in various places has removed it. This includes false ideas about

¹ Originally published in *The Reformed Theological Review*, August, 2003, 62/2, pp.61-96. It can also be found on the Internet @ http://www.matthiasmedia.com.au/briefing/webextra/march04_chappleesv.pdf

² See the preface to the ESV Bible, p.vii. *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version Containing the Old and New Testaments* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2001)

the history of man, biblical authorship, as well as liberal theology (e.g. “expiation” (RSV) has been replaced by “propitiation” in Romans 3:25 and other texts)

- h. has removed confusing footnotes in the RSV (e.g. Genesis 1:1)

The ESV seems to show a much greater respect for the Bible as the Word of God than the RSV. This is clear even from its translation of 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.” (The RSV translated *(theopneustos)* as “inspired.”)

However, on the negative side we also noted that:

- a. where the ESV changes the RSV it can be excessively literalistic and its wording is sometimes muddled and confusing (e.g. Exodus 21:22)
- b. at times the ESV seems unaware of weaknesses in the RSV and has adopted the RSV without any change. A striking example of this is 1 Samuel 13:1 where the ESV, like the RSV, leaves a “hole” in the English text. (see Appendix A, 2.2.1.1.iii)
- c. out of 26 suggestions by the 1977 CBT for changes in the Old Testament of the RSV, only 12 have been followed in the ESV. Out of 11 suggestions for changes to the New Testament of the RSV from the 1974 report, 7 were followed, and one suggestion was placed in a footnote. In a sampling of five recommendations to the translation of Philippians, the ESV made no changes to the RSV. In Hebrews, the ESV makes two notable changes to five randomly chosen sample texts. This raises the question of just how thorough is the ESV’s revision of the RSV.
- d. the ESV does not seem to fit with its own principles of translation. This is the main criticism of the ESV in the review article by Dr. Allan Chapple. Whereas the preface to the ESV states the “the ESV is an “essentially literal translation” that seeks as far as possible to capture the precise wording of the original text and personal style of each Bible writer” (*Preface*, “Translation Philosophy”) Dr. Chapple remarks that it seems to have chosen the wrong starting point: the RSV does not fit these goals well.

This critique of the ESV, however, is more about its claims than about it actually being a poor translation. Dr. Chapple notes various things – the language of the ESV can be old-fashioned, it does not edit the RSV consistently – but his main point is that the ESV seems to misrepresent itself.

³ See for instance, Rodney J. Decker “The ESV NT: A Review Article” which can be found @ http://faculty.bbc.edu/rdecker/documents/ESV_Review.pdf

In other critical reviews of the ESV, a similar stance is taken. Such a stance is not so much a critique of the ESV and where it has made changes, but rather of the underlying RSV. The RSV is then compared to the aims and principles of the ESV and is shown to be a poor starting point for the ESV.³ In light of the ESV's stated goals and claims, the underlying RSV seems to be a "soft underbelly."

2.2 Input Received From the Churches

The committee received comments from several individuals regarding the ESV but as this did not fall under our mandate we did not formally deal with them. Here is a summary of the responses from the churches, from which we were mandated to solicit input:

1. Winnipeg Redeemer (October 15, 2004)
Offers some "casual" remarks observed by consistory concerning the ESV. Among them are that: the ESV seems to follow RSV in appealing to the LXX on debated readings in OT; some signs of poor editing in the ESV, in terms of grammar and syntax. Redeemer gives no recommendation.
2. Burlington Ebenezer (October 19, 2004)
Recommending the committee take note of a study by A. Chapple whose findings they endorse. Also Ebenezer believes that the NIV and/or NRSV are not so inadequate as to demand a new translation. Ebenezer is not in favour of replacing the NIV with the ESV.
3. Willoughby Heights (November 06, 2004)
Recommending Rev. C. Vandervelde's article in *Clarion* and certain websites for our study. Willoughby is keenly interested in the possible recommendation of the ESV as they have not found consensus on the recommended translation by Synod 1995 (NIV) and continue to use the RSV.
4. Rockway (now Tintern Spring Creek - November 16, 2004)
Recommending Rev. C. Vandervelde's article in *Clarion* for our consideration. Tintern believes the ESV merits careful consideration but stops short of endorsing it or calling for change.
5. Burlington-Waterdown (January 31, 2005)
Heartily urges the Committee to recommend to Synod that the ESV be used in the churches. Various arguments are presented against the NIV and in favour of the ESV. Anecdotal evidence is provided.

Your committee was happy to receive this input but wondered whether any conclusion could be drawn from the fact that only five churches felt

the need to respond to our request for input. In leading up to the decision of Synod 1995, past CBT's received considerable correspondence from the churches. Since 1998, however, correspondence has decreased and the Committee reported in both 2001 and 2004 that no correspondence had been received from the churches concerning the text of the NIV. This would seem to indicate that the issue of pursuing additional Bible translations is no longer a pressing concern within the churches and that the vast majority of congregations are content with the NIV.

The specific data presented to us in the various letters was covered by the committee's own investigation via the old CBT reports. Of the five responses, we note that one church still uses the RSV and would be served by an investigation of the ESV. Two churches do not have strong opinions, and two others find themselves on opposing ground: one for the ESV, another against it.

2.3 Conclusion

Based on our initial look into the quality of the ESV and that the call for a new translation is not pressing in the churches as a whole, we wonder about the benefits of doing a thorough study of the ESV. The churches appear to be well served by the NIV. After a decade of usage, our members are finally getting used to it and are making it their own. The committee does not believe it healthy to frequently change the recommended translation of the Word of God for use in the churches, a translation that is to be in our hearts and upon our lips. Continuity from generation to generation is beneficial and desirable, if at all possible. Necessity may dictate otherwise (as in the case of the RSV), but until that point, the committee urges caution in this matter.

On the other hand, we as churches have used the RSV for many years. The ESV is, in many respects, a considerable improvement over it, especially in key matters of theology and text. A full investigation, perhaps with a comparison with the NIV, may reveal further strengths (and perhaps also weaknesses!) of this translation. However, given that Synod 1995 found that the RSV could no longer be recommended because there are "better translations available," and that the ESV is built upon the RSV text, is it truly worth the time and effort to engage in a full investigation? The committee is unsure and seeks clarity from Synod on this point.

As a committee we are unsure of the basic purpose of Synod Chatham's charge to conduct a preliminary investigation. Was it to consider the ESV as a replacement for the NIV? Or was it to provide an alternative to the RSV still used by at least one church? Or was it to give all the churches the possibility for another translation recommendable for study purposes? The committee would be well served with clear direction from the present General Synod as to what purpose would be served in pursuing any further investigation of the ESV.

3.0 Suggested Improvements for the NIV

The committee received a letter from Rev. Van Oene with five areas of concern. Three of his concerns had been dealt with by previous CBT reports. His two remaining concerns could find no consensus among the committee members and so we have left it open to Rev. VanOene whether to come with further elucidation of his points.

4.0 Monitoring New Developments

As far as we are aware, there were no new developments in the field of Bible translation.

5.0 Recommendations

Your committee recommends General Synod 2007 to:

1. reappoint a CBT with the ongoing mandate as articulated by Synod 2001
2. weigh the committee's preliminary investigation along with the input received from the churches to determine if a *full* investigation of the ESV is warranted
3. make it clear to the committee the purpose of such an investigation (if any) and what the place of the ESV might be in the churches
4. give the committee guidance re: travel costs. The committee is spread out over some distance and this makes work more difficult. Phone and email are useful, but in-person meetings are even more beneficial. The committee would have more aggressively pursued such meetings, but we were unsure about the funds allocated to cover such a meeting.
5. appoint a new committee member to replace Rev. J. Ludwig as his term expires in 2007. Past committees have urged, if possible, that an expert in English linguistics be appointed to the committee. This would be particularly valuable if the committee is called upon to do a *full* investigation of the ESV.

Appendix A: Preliminary Study of the ESV

Preliminary Investigation of the English Standard Version (ESV)

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3.0 Conclusions

3.1 Summary

3.2 Recommendation

1.0 Methodology

General Synod Chatham 2004 instructed the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) to do a “preliminary investigation” of the English Standard Version (ESV) (*Acta*. 78 5.2.1.).

Your committee has decided to do this by comparing the ESV to the Revised Standard Version (RSV). This is permissible since the ESV claims for itself the legacy of the RSV and sees itself as “carrying forward this legacy for a new century.” If, therefore, it cannot be established that the ESV is a significant improvement over the RSV then it would hardly be advisable for the churches to spend time pursuing the ESV as a possible translation. What follows, then, is a comparison between the two translations, making use of the same data and criteria found in the 1995 CBT Report to General Synod where the RSV was compared with other translations. That Report itself relies upon two earlier evaluations of the RSV, namely the 1974 and 1977 CBT Reports to General Synod, which also are considered again here. For ease of comparison the structure of the 1995 report has been followed.

2.0 The Data

2.1 General Items

2.1.1 1974 Report

2.1.1.1 General Recommendations

i. The committee recommended that **“Scripture portions considered insufficiently attested should be put in the text between brackets with an explanatory footnote rather than in the footnotes as in the RSV.”**

As a result of the above suggestion the RSV in its 1972 revision of the NT restored into the text Mark 16: 9-20, John 7:53-8:11, Luke 22: 19b-20, and Luke 24:51b, while Luke 22:43-44 and part of Luke 12:39 were taken from the text and put into footnotes.

The ESV follows the RSV by including Mark 16:9-20, John 7:53-8:11 and Luke 22:19b-20 in the text. These three passages are put in parentheses and prefaced with the remark “Some of the earliest manuscripts do not include....” Like the RSV it does not include part of Lk.12:39 in the text but inserts it in a footnote. Luke 24:51b is included in the text without any parentheses or footnote. Luke

22:43, 44 is restored to the text with the footnote, "Some manuscripts omit verses 43 and 44." Both the RSV and ESV do not include the words from 1 Jn.5: 7,8 ("testify in heaven: the Father, the Word, and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one, and there are three that testify on earth....") since these words are not found in any Greek manuscript before the sixteenth century.

Comment: The ESV has improved on the RSV by restoring Luke 24:51b and Luke 22:43,44 to the text.

ii. Wherever the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity is mentioned, the pronoun referring to Him should be personal and not neuter, as is often the case in the RSV (e.g. Romans 5:5; 8:11; Ephesians 1:14; 1 John 3: 24).

In the four texts listed above, the RSV uses the impersonal relative "which" when the Holy Spirit is mentioned. John 7:39 and 1 Corinthians 2:12 can also be added. In every instance, the ESV uses the personal relative ("who" or "whom") for the Holy Spirit.

Comment: The ESV has improved on the RSV.

iii. The accuracy and the value of the Massoretic Text should be reconsidered so that it is held in much greater respect than that the translating process than is the case in the RSV.

Appendix 14 in the Committee on Bible Translation's *Report to General Synod Abbotstford 1995* contains a "Textual Comparison of Certain passages in Hosea." It revealed that the RSV is not faithful to the Masoretic Text (MT). For each of the five examples found below, the MT, the RSV and the ESV are given.

<i>Masoretic Text</i>	<i>RSV</i>	<i>ESV</i>
a) Hos 5:2 "the revolvers are deep in slaughter."	"And they have made deep the pit of Shittim."	"And the revolvers have gone deep into slaughter."
b) Hos 7:16 "they turn, not upward."	"they turn to Baal"	"they return, but not upwards"
c) Hos 8:13 "sacrifices of my gifts."	"they love sacrifice"	"as for my sacrificial offerings"
d) Hos 9:6 "for behold, they have gone because of destruction."	"For behold, they are going to Assyria."	"For behold, they are going away from destruction"
e) Hos 14:5[6] "and he shall strike his roots like the Lebanon."	"he shall strike root as the poplar."	"he shall take root like the trees of Lebanon."

Comment: Out of the thirty texts examined in Appendix 14, the ESV remains faithful to the MT twenty-six times. This is a definite improvement over the RSV which emends that text.

iv. Retain the distinctiveness of the "Tetragrammaton" by rendering it "Yahweh." The RSV translates "LORD."

Comment: The ESV follows the RSV's practice of translating *hwby* by "LORD."

v. Some consistent effort at reflecting the unity of the Old and New Testament should be made in the translating process where this is possible. The RSV was lacking on this point.

a) Comparison of Genesis 12:3, 18:18 with Galatians 3:8

Genesis 12:3 – RSV – “I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves.”^q

^q *Or in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed*

Genesis 18:18 – RSV – “seeing that Abraham shall become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves by him?”^d

^d *Or in him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.*

Galatians 3:8 – RSV – “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

Genesis 12:3 – ESV – “I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”³

³ *Or by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves*

Genesis 18:18 – ESV – “seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?”

No footnote to the ESV text.

Galatians 3:8 – ESV – “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham saying, “In you shall all nations be blessed.”

Comment: Though in the footnotes the RSV contains a translation more consistent with the NT quotation, in the main text it does not reflect the unity between the OT and NT that is in fact there. This has been resolved by the ESV which reverses the RSV’s decision. The ESV in the main text places the translation consistent with the NT, while footnoting the alternate translation in Genesis 12:3. This is an improvement over the RSV.

b) Comparison of Genesis 22:18, 26:4 & 28:14 with Acts 3:25 & Gal 3:16

Genesis 22:18 – RSV – “and by your descendants shall all the nations of the earth bless themselves, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Genesis 26:4 – RSV – “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves:”

Genesis 28:14 – RSV – “and your descendants shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and by you and your descendants shall all the families of the earth bless themselves.”^D

b Or *be blessed*

Acts 3:25 – RSV – “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”

Galatians 3:16 – RSV – “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many; but, referring to one, “And to your offspring,” which is Christ.”

Genesis 22:18 – ESV – “and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Genesis 26:4 – ESV – “I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 28:14 – ESV – “Your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and in you and your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

No footnote to ESV text.

Acts 3:25 – ESV – “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’”

Galatians 3:16 – ESV – “Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

Comment: The key words in the above quotations are “descendants, posterity, and offspring.” Notably, the RSV uses all three thus diverting attention from the underlying original same word while the ESV uses only one term consistently, “offspring.” The RSV indeed obscures the unity of the two Testaments when it uses two different words in the NT to translate the quotation from the OT. The most literal and preferred translation of the Hebrew זרע (zera) is “seed.” While the ESV has chosen “offspring,” it has done so consistently and is able to show both the unity of the Testaments and also the variation in the singular and plural (collective) usage of this noun. For this reason the ESV is a significant improvement over the RSV.

c) Comparison of Deuteronomy 6:4 with Mark 12:29

Deut 6:4 – RSV - “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD;”^e

^e Or the LORD our God the LORD is one

Mark 12:29 – RSV – “Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one;””

Deut 6:4 – ESV – “Hear O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one.”³

³ Or the LORD our God is one LORD

Or the LORD is our God, the LORD is one

Or the LORD is our God, the LORD alone

Or the LORD is our God, the LORD is one

Or the LORD is our God, the LORD alone

Mark 12:29 – ESV – “Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’””

Comment: The RSV again creates confusion in the mind of the reader by not aligning the OT translation with the NT quotation of the same text, when in the original languages this is perfectly permissible, as the footnotes indicate. While the RSV relegates the consistent translation to the footnotes, the ESV brings it out in the main text so that the unity of the Scriptures is overtly preserved. Once again the ESV is an improvement over the RSV.

d) Comparison of Deuteronomy 32:43 and Romans 15:10

Deut 32:43 – RSV – “Praise his people, O you nations; for he avenges the blood of his servants, and takes vengeance on his adversaries, and makes expiation for the land of his people.”⁹

⁹ Gk Vg: *his land his people*
[Septuagint, Vulgate - CBT]

Romans 15:10 – RSV – “and again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people”;

Deut 32:43 – ESV – “Rejoice with him, O heavens; bow down to him, all gods⁴, for he avenges the blood of his children⁵ and takes vengeance on his adversaries. He repays⁶ those who hate him⁶ and cleanses⁷ his people’s land.⁸”

⁴ Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint; Masoretic Text *Rejoice his people, O nations*

⁵ Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint; Masoretic Text *servants*

⁶ Dead Sea Scroll, Septuagint; Masoretic Text lacks *He repays those who hate him*

⁷ Or *atones for*

⁸ Septuagint, Vulgate; Hebrew *his land his people*”

Romans 15:10 – ESV – “And again it is said, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.

Comment: While the OT verse has several issues surrounding its proper translation, the key matter with respect to preserving the unity of the Testaments is the opening phrase, “Praise his people, O you nations” (RSV). The RSV does not align this very well with the NT quotation which reads, “Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.” In fact, the OT translation in the RSV gives a completely different meaning than the NT quotation. In the OT translation, praise of the Gentile nations is directed to God’s *people* instead of, as the NT has it, to *God Himself* in conjunction with God’s people. In addition, the RSV does not note any alternative translation of the OT text.

However, the ESV has only muddied the waters still further. The ESV has gone away from the original Masoretic Text and freely substituted the reading from both the Dead Sea Scroll and the Septuagint. The result is that the connection with Paul's quotation in Romans 15 is virtually severed altogether, for while Paul is concerned to highlight the inclusion of the Gentiles with the people of God, the ESV in translating the OT text gives an entirely different sense, "Rejoice with him, O heavens." While the ESV does retain the literal rendering of the Masoretic Text in the footnote, even there it is not clear how that connects to Paul's usage of this text in Romans 15. It must be concluded that the ESV is in this instance worse than the RSV in obscuring the unity of Scripture.

e) Comparison of Psalm 45:6[7] with Hebrews 1:8

Psalm 45:6[7] – RSV – "Your divine throne endures for ever and ever. Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;"^h

^h Or *Your throne is a throne of God or Thy throne, O God*

Hebrews 1:8 - RSV - "But of the Son he says, "Thy throne, O God^a, is for ever and ever, the righteous scepter is the scepter of thy^b kingdom.""

^a Or *God is thy throne*

^b Other ancient authorities read *his*

Psalm 45:6[7] – ESV – "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever. The scepter of your kingdom is a scepter of uprightness;"

No footnote to the ESV text.

Hebrews 1:8 – ESV – "But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.""

No footnote to the ESV text.

Comment: In its main text the RSV definitely obscures the direct relationship between the two texts. In the OT passage, the sense is given that a human king has a divine throne (this is evident because of the usage of "your" instead of "thy" which is, in the RSV, reserved for references to God), while in the NT passage the RSV clearly translates (correctly) "Thy throne, O God." While the RSV does put the correct translation of Psalm 45 in its footnote, its choice of main text downplays the inherent unity of the Testaments. The ESV, on the other hand is much truer to the original OT text and, at the same time, perfectly consistent with the NT quotation as found in Hebrews 1. The main text of the ESV in this case definitely preserves and promotes the unity of the Scriptures and so is a distinct improvement over the RSV.

- vi. **The RSV had as policy to use "thee" and "thou" when referring to God. Therefore it was suggested that when the Lord Jesus is referred to, "thou" and "thee" should be used to reflect his deity.**

- A. The ESV has as part of its translation policy to strive for “current usage” in the English language. That has led to the abandoning of the archaic terms “Thee” and “Thou” altogether so that with respect to pronoun usage, neither God in the OT nor God in the NT, including then the Lord Jesus Christ, is distinguishable from any other referent. Whatever one may think of that development in policy, it does have the advantage of consistency and all danger of implicitly demoting or obscuring the divinity of the Lord Jesus by lack of using the “divine” pronoun in reference to Him is removed.
- B. Concern was also expressed that the RSV had a weak Christology on other points. Although many passages pertaining to the person of Christ were accurately translated, texts faulted in the RSV for not showing Christ’s deity included Romans 9:5 (where “God” is separated from “Christ” by a period and so Christ is not identified as God) and Hebrews 2:11 (where the translation intimates that Christ has an origin [“of one origin”]. This would be in conflict with John 1:1,2.)

a) Comparison of Romans 9:5 and Hebrews 2:11

Romans 9:5 – RSV – “to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever.ⁿ Amen.”

ⁿ Or Christ, who is God over all, blessed for ever

Hebrews 2:11 – RSV – “For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren,”

Romans 9:5 – ESV – “To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

No footnote to the ESV text.

Hebrews 2:11 – ESV – “For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers,”

Comment: With respect to Romans 9:5, the ESV is a vast improvement over the RSV, making the divinity of Christ clear and unequivocal. It has done away altogether with the RSV rendering, not even dignifying it with a footnote. However, with respect to Hebrews 2:11, the ESV has made no improvement at all and continues to intimate that Christ has an origin. In sum, then, the ESV has advanced the Christology beyond the RSV, but not yet as far as it should be.

2.1.1.2 **Conclusions re the 1974 Report**

In the sections considered, the ESV has in the main demonstrated a careful reconsideration of the RSV. It generally has a much better respect for the Masoretic Text than the RSV. It also shows a greater respect for the personhood of the Holy Spirit as well as the divine nature of Christ. With regards to the unity of Scripture, in four of the five comparisons of OT texts and their NT quotations, the ESV is a marked improvement over the RSV. In one instance, however, it is actually worse than the RSV and demonstrates a certain carelessness with the Masoretic Text of the OT. Still, overall the ESV proves more faithful in preserving the unity of the Scriptures by translating the passages in question more consistently than the RSV.

2.1.2.1977 Report

2.1.2.1 **General Observations**

i. Indications of unscriptural influence concerning the translation of texts dealing with the Holy Spirit.

See section 2.1.1.1.ii of this report.

ii. Indications of the influence of modern critical scholarship in the Old Testament.

The RSV succumbed to critical liberal scholarship in several places.

Examples given in the 1974 report were:

- a) Joshua 10:12. Joshua, in the RSV, addresses the sun and moon with “thou” implying he worshipped them.
- b) Genesis 11:1 is translated to suggest that men had few words and language was in a primitive state, still evolving.
- c) Psalm 51 is given a post-exilic authorship when vs. 18 [20 MT] is translated as “Rebuild the walls of Jersualem” rather than “build the walls of Jerusalem.”

Comment: The ESV no longer uses “thee” and “thou” which avoids the mistake of the RSV in Joshua 10:12. Genesis 11:1 is translated by the ESV as “Now the whole earth had one language and the same words.” Psalm 51:18, as mentioned elsewhere in this report, is translated in the ESV to allow for Davidic authorship – “build” not “rebuild.”

iii. Indications of unnecessary contradictions in the RSV.

In addition to places in the RSV where the unity of the Old and New Testaments was not maintained (see section 2.1.1.1.v of this report), the 1974 Report noted a problem with Genesis 9:20. Elsewhere the report mentions Deuteronomy 16:7.

Comment: Instead of “Noah was the first tiller of the soil” the ESV translates in Genesis 9:20 “Noah began to be a man of the soil” removing the conflict with Genesis 4:2 where we learn Cain worked the ground. In Deuteronomy 16:7 the verb “cook” is used in the ESV, removing the conflict with Exodus 12:9 in the RSV. The ESV is an improvement over the RSV.

2.2.1.2 Conclusions re the 1977 Report

The committee feared “the RSV shows evidence of unscriptural influence.” The ESV is conscious of the critical leaven present in the RSV and in various instances has removed it.

2.2. Specific Recommendations

2.2.1 Old Testament

2.2.1.1 1974 Report

i. Recommendations were made for changes in the RSV in Genesis 1:1, 9:20, 11:1, 24:67, 25:27. For treatment of Genesis 9:20, 11:1 see above (2.1.2.1.ii)

a) Genesis 1:1

Genesis 1:1 – RSV – “In the beginning, God created^a the heavens and the earth.”

^a or *When God began to create*

Genesis 1:1 – ESV – “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.”

No footnote to the ESV text.

The ESV the removes footnote which could suggest the pre-existence of matter.

b) Genesis 24:67

The ESV does not relegate part of the Masoretic Text to a footnote and give the impression the Hebrew has “added” something to Scripture.

Genesis 24:67 – RSV – “Then Isaac brought her into the tent,^o and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her.

^o Heb adds *Sarah his mother*

Genesis 24:67 – ESV – “Then Isaac brought her into the tent of Sarah his mother and took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her.”

No footnote to the ESV text.

c) Genesis 25:27

The committee preferred to translate ^{mT}; (*tām*) as “plain.” The ESV still uses the RSV rendering “quiet.”

Conclusion: Again, the ESV is for the most part an improvement on the RSV, especially on more serious matters of translation.

ii. Recommendations were made for changes in the RSV of Exodus 21:22, 32:1,4,8, Deuteronomy 11:14, 16:7.

For Deuteronomy 16:7 see above.

a) Exodus 21:22

Exodus 21:22 – RSV – “When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges determine.”

Exodus 21:22 – ESV – “When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman’s husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine.”

Here the ESV can be commended for not speaking of a miscarriage (which now allows a pro-life perspective). However, the excessive literalness here – “children” – is hardly a translation and may cause additional confusion. The plural is best taken as an indefinite singular.

b) Exodus 32:1,4,8 – RSV “gods” – ESV “gods”

In each instance the ESV seems unaware of the weakness of the RSV and retains the translation “gods.” There is no indication that Israel had become polytheistic.

c) Deuteronomy 11:14,15

Deut 11:14-15a – RSV – “he^j will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he^j will give grass in your fields for your cattle . . .”

^j Sam Gk Vg: Heb *l*; also verse 15

Deut 11:14-15a – ESV – “he¹ will give the rain for your land in its season, the early rain and the later rain, that you may gather in your grain and your wine and your oil. And he will give grass in your fields for your livestock . . .”

^l Samaritan, Septuagint, Vulgate; Hebrew *l*; also verse 15

Both ESV and RSV do not follow the Masoretic Text where Moses speaks for the LORD, but instead footnote it.

Conclusion: The ESV is sensitive to the problems associated with the RSV’s rendering of Exodus 21:22 and has changed its translation – but not with great skill. In the two other instances it still follows the inferior RSV rendering and is not aware of the weaknesses in the RSV.

iii. Recommendations were made for changes in 1 Sam 13:1; 1 Kings 7:24 (2 points), 39; 8:12; 2 Chron 4:3,5,10; 21:2

a) 1 Samuel 13:1

1 Samuel 13:1 – RSV – “Saul was ...^j years old when he began to reign, and he reigned ... and two^k years over Israel.

^j The number is lacking in Heb
^k Two is not the entire number; something has dropped out

1 Samuel 13:1 – ESV – “Saul was ...⁶ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned ... and two⁷ years over Israel.

⁶ The number is lacking in Hebrew and Septuagint
⁷ Two may not be the entire number; something may have dropped out

The RSV and ESV are identical. The committee recommendation to leave the verse out with an explanation in the footnote or to insert an estimated number of years with a footnote to explain the estimate so that the verse can be read is not followed by the ESV.

b) 1 Kings 7:23

1. RSV has “for thirty cubits” and the ESV has “for ten cubits”. The committee recommended to translate: “ten to a cubit” which ‘is the obvious meaning of the MT.’
2. The RSV and ESV both use “gourds.” The committee recommended that since the word is vague in the Hebrew that a more vague term be used. They suggest to translate with “knobs”.

c) 2 Chron. 4:10 and 1 Kings 7:39

The committee recommended to translate “at the right side of the house to the southeast” since this is more fitting for a rather careful description of which this is part. The ESV follows the RSV in the translation of these identical texts.

d) 1 Kings 8:12

The committee recommended the Greek addition “the Lord has set the sun in the heavens but” be omitted from this text in the RSV. The ESV does not have this addition.

e) 2 Chron. 21:2

The committee recommended translating “king of Israel” in agreement with the MT. Both the RSV and ESV translate “king of Judah”. Neither RSV nor the ESV substitute Judah for Israel in other places, c.f. 2 Chron. 12:6, 19:8, 21:4, 23:2. The committee suggests that at least a footnote should be added that “Israel” is in the MT text. Neither the RSV nor ESV supplies such a footnote.

Conclusion: The ESV is an improvement, but only in some areas.

iv. Recommendations were made for changes in Job 17:3, 36:21b; Ps. 2:12; 29:1; 51:18[20]

For a treatment of Ps. 51:18 [20 MT] see section 2.1.2.1.ii.

a) Job 17:3

The committee recommended a footnote be added: Heb. “strike hands with me.” The ESV does not add such a footnote.

b) Job 36:21b

The committee recommended the following translation: “because for this reason you were tested by affliction.”
The ESV follows the RSV.

c) Ps. 2:12

The committee recommended the translation: “Kiss the Son.”

The ESV follows this recommendation.

d) Ps. 29:1

Psalm 29:1 – RSV – “Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,⁹ ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.”

⁹ Heb *sons of God*

Psalm 29:1 – ESV – “Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings,¹ ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.”

¹ Hebrew sons of God, or sons of might

The committee recommended the translation: “sons of God” instead of “heavenly beings.”

The ESV follows the RSV in the text. The RSV has a footnote that the Hebrew reads “sons of gods”. The ESV has a footnote that the Hebrew reads “sons of God” or “sons of might”. The ESV footnote is an improvement in that it understands God in the singular and not gods in the plural as given in the RSV.

Although there is an important change in the ESV footnote, there is no improvement in the text.

Conclusion: Again the ESV shows some improvement, but not in all areas of concern.

v. Recommendations were made for changes in Isaiah 49:17, Ezekiel 29:19; 34:16; Hosea 12:6[7]; Zech 6:13.

a) Isaiah 49:17

The committee recommended adding a footnote to “builders” indicating this is an emendation taken from “one ancient version, LXX, Vulgate” and to show that Hebrew has ‘sons’. The ESV adds a footnote indicating the reading comes from a Dead Sea Scroll and that the Hebrew has ‘children’. The ESV follows the committee recommendation although using ‘children’ rather than ‘sons’.

b) Ezekiel 27:19

The committee recommended to retain the Hebrew and translate e.g. “Vedan and Javan paid for your wares from Uzal”.

The ESV follows the RSV. Both place the Heb. 'Vedan and Javan' in the footnote.

c) Ezekiel 34:16

The committee recommended to retain the Hebrew and translate, "the fat and the strong I will destroy".

The ESV follows this recommendation and places in a footnote the alternative reading from the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, "I will watch over. (The RSV makes a note that its reading comes from the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate and that the Hebrew has "destroy").

The ESV is an improvement for it places the Hebrew in the text.

d) Hosea 12:6

The committee recommended to translate, "So you, return to your God".
The ESV follows the RSV.

e) Zechariah 6:13

The committee recommended to translate, "and He shall be a priest on His throne."

The ESV follows the RSV.

Conclusion: The ESV makes improvements in two out of five instances.

2.2.1.2 1977 Report: Recommended Changes to the RSV

i. Recommendations were made for changes in Gen 21:9; Exod 11:1; Deut 18:1; 1 Sam 10:16; 12:3; 2 Kings 16:6; Ps 136:10; Zech 9:8.

a) Gen. 21:9

The committee recommended instead of "playing with her son Isaac" to translate "mocking".

The ESV follows this recommendation although instead of translating "mocking" it translates "laughing" and in a footnote comments, "Possibly laughing in mockery".

b) Exodus 11:1

The committee recommended that instead of “The Lord said to Moses” translate “Now the Lord had said to Moses.” The ESV follows the RSV.

e) Deut. 18:1

The committee recommended that instead of “The Levitical priests, that is, all the tribe of Levi” translate “The priests, the Levites – the whole tribe of Levi.”

The ESV translates “The Levitical priests, all the tribes of Levi”. The concern for the committee was that the RSV translation says that all the Levites were priests, which is debatable.

The ESV follows the RSV by speaking about “Levitical priests” but leaves out the expression “that is”. By doing so the ESV leaves open the understanding that the text refers to priests within the tribe of Levi.

Although the ESV does not completely follow the committee recommendation, it is an improvement over the RSV.

f) 2 Kings 16:6

The committee recommended to translate “Rezin, the King of Aram” instead of “the King of Edom”. The committee argues there is no reason to cross out “Rezin” and to replace “Aram” with “Edom”.

The ESV follows the committee’s recommendation by translating “Rezin the king of Syria” (Syria = Aram).

g) Ps. 136:10

The committee recommended to translate, “To him who smote Egypt in their first born” in order to bring out the force in the original Hebrew.

The ESV essentially follows the RSV.

h) Zech. 9:8

The committee recommended to translate “now I see” with “now I have seen”.

The ESV follows the RSV.

Conclusion: In three instances the ESV is an improvement.

ii. Recommendations were made for changes in Isaiah 2:12; 5:14,17,26; 9:20[19]; 14:19,30; 16:10.

a) Isaiah 2:12

The committee recommended that instead of “against all that is lifted up and high” to translate “so that it is brought low”.

The ESV translates “against all that is lifted up – and it shall be brought low”.

b) Isaiah 5:14

The committee recommended instead of “the nobility of Jerusalem” to translate “its nobility”.

The ESV follows the RSV both in the text as well as in the footnote.

c) Isaiah 9:20

The committee recommended that instead of “each devours his neighbour’s flesh” to translate with the Authorized Version (AV), “the flesh of his own arm.”

The ESV translates “the flesh of his own arm” in agreement with the committee recommendation.

d) Isaiah 14:30

The committee recommended instead of “And your remnant I will slay” to translate “And your remnant he will slay.”

The ESV translates “and your remnant it will slay.” The ESV changes the “I” to “it” so it has chosen to render it in the neuter. In this it follows the NIV translation. Although the RSV translates “I” it notes in the footnote that the Hebrew uses “he”. There is no such note in the ESV. Because of the footnote indicating the Hebrew, the RSV is to be preferred to the ESV.

e) Isaiah 16:10

The committee recommended instead of “the vintage shout is hushed” to translate “I have made to cease.”

The ESV translates “I have put an end to the shouting” which is identical to the NIV translation.

The ESV essentially follows the committee recommendation and makes an improvement.

Conclusion: The ESV improves on the translation of three of the above mentioned texts in Isaiah.

Summary Conclusion: From the samples taken from the 1977 Report, the ESV made improvements in the case of 12 texts but made no improvements in 14. Slightly less than half of the recommendations made by previous CBT reports have been implemented by the ESV. The ESV does show that it tries more consistently than the RSV to incorporate the Masoretic Text (i.e. the Hebrew original) reading into its translation. This is an improvement over the RSV.

2.2.2 New Testament

2.2.2.1. 1974 Report

i. Recommendations were made for changes in Luke 4:22; Rom 3:9,25 (and in the that connection also 1 John 2:2, 4:10;) Rom 3:30, 4:13, 8:10; Heb 6:14, 12:24; 1 John 5:16,17.

a) Luke 4:22

The committee recommended instead of “and all spoke well of him...” to translate “and all testified about him.”

The ESV follows the RSV.

b) Rom 3:9

The committee recommended instead of “Are we Jews any better off?” to translate “Are we any better off?”

The ESV follows the RSV in the text but in a footnote incorporates the recommendation by leaving out “Jews.”

The ESV makes a slight improvement.

c) Rom 3:25 [and in that connection 1 Jn.2:2; 4:10]

The committee recommended instead of “whom God put forward as an expiation....” to translate “whom God put forward as a propitiation [or: satisfaction]....”

The ESV follows the recommendation in this text and in 1 Jn.2:2; 4:10.

d) Rom 3:30

The committee recommended instead of “He will justify the circumcised on the ground of their faith....” to translate “He will justify the circumcised by faith...”

The ESV makes the recommended change.

e) Rom.4:13

The committee recommended instead of “The promise to Abraham . . .” “For the promise to Abraham . . .”

The ESV follows the 1974 recommendation

f) Rom.8:10

The committee recommended instead of “your spirits are alive” “the Spirit is alive.”

The ESV translates “the Spirit is life.”

g) Heb.6:14

The committee recommended instead of “Surely I will bless you and multiply you....” to translate “Surely I will richly bless you and greatly multiply you...”

The ESV follows the RSV.

h) Heb.12:24

The committee recommended instead of “speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel” to translate “speaks more graciously than Abel.”

The ESV translates “that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.”

i) 1 Jn.5:16,17

The committee recommended instead of “a mortal sin” to translate “a sin leading to death.”

The ESV follows the recommendation.

Conclusion: The ESV follows the recommended translations of the 1977 Report in seven out of eleven instances, and in one case puts the recommendation in a footnote.

2.2.2.2. 1977 Report

i. Recommendations were made for changes in Matthew 27:3, Rom 4:25; 1 Cor 5:5.

a) Matt.27:3

The committee recommended to translate “*seized with remorse*” instead of “repented.” This brings out the meaning of the original clearer, in distinction to μ (metanoēō). With the present translation, no distinction is made between μ μ μ (metamelomai) and μ (metanoēō).

The ESV does not follow the recommendation, but it does make a change: “when Judas . . . saw that Jesus was condemned, he *changed his mind* . . .” (italics added)

b) Rom.4:25

Instead of “who was put to death” (RSV) translate “who was delivered up to death.” This is a better translation of (paredothē).

The ESV has “. . . who was delivered up for our trespasses . . .”

c) 1 Cor. 5:5

Instead of “you are to deliver this man to Satan” the committee recommended translating “to deliver this man to Satan.” The “you” is uncalled for since it is an act of Paul together with the congregation assembled with the power of the LORD Jesus.

The ESV does not make any change to the RSV and has “you.”

Conclusion: The ESV is an improvement two out of three instances.

ii. Recommendations were made for changes in Philippians 1:5,16,17,20,27,28,; 2:5,16,22,30; 3:3,6,7,15; 4:11.

Here follows a sampling of five comparisons of the ESV with the recommended changes to the RSV translation:

a) Phil 1:16

The committee recommended “appointed for” instead of “put here for” (RSV) The addition of “here” is avoided and more justice is done to verb with preposition (eis).

The ESV translates “put here for.”

b) Phil 1:20

The committee recommended changing “courage” (RSV) to “boldness.” This is closer to the meaning of μ (*parrēsia*) and fits better in context.

The ESV translates “courage.”

c) Phil 1:27

The RSV translates “I may hear of you.” The committee recommended “I may hear concerning you” which does more justice to μ (*ta peri humōn*) (the things concerning you.)

The ESV translates “I may hear of you.”

d) Phil 2:16

The committee recommended “with a view to the day of Christ” instead of “so that in the day of Christ.” (RSV) This brings out better the meaning of (*eis*) before μ (*hēmeran*.)

The ESV translates “so that in the day of Christ.”

e) Phil 3:7

The RSV translates “I counted as loss.” The committee recommended changing this to “I have counted as loss” – the perfect tense as is in the text (followed by present.)

The ESV translates “I counted as loss.”

Conclusion: In each of the five samples the ESV follows the RSV and makes no change or improvement in line with the recommendation of the Committee.

**iii. Recommendations were made for changes
in Hebrews 1:5,6,12; 2:6,8,14,16; 3:4,9,12;
4:1,13,16; 6:6, 15,16,18,7:3; 9:22**

Here follows a sampling of five comparisons of the ESV with the recommended changes to the RSV translation:

a) Heb 2:8

The RSV translates “putting everything in subjection.” The committee recommended “all things hast those put in subjection” since the Greek

(*hupetaxas*) is clearly the 2nd person singular indicative active aorist.

The ESV translates “putting everything in subjection.”

b) Heb 2:14

The committee recommended changing “of the same nature” (RSV) to “of the same” (leave out the noun “nature.”) This is more direct as it refers as it refers to flesh and blood. It also excludes any philosophical connotations which might be made.

The ESV translates “of the same things.” This improves on the RSV by removing a noun with potentially improper philosophical connotations and choosing a plural noun. It is easier for the reader to infer the double referent of both flesh and blood.

c) Heb 2:16

The RSV translates “but with the descendants of Abraham.” The committee recommended changing this to “on the contrary he is concerned with the seed of Abraham.” There is no reason to leave second μ
(*epilambanetai*) out nor to change ‘seed’ into ‘descendants.’

The ESV translates “but he helps the offspring of Abraham.” This is a slight improvement by retaining the second mention of the verb but the ESV does not translate the literal “seed” in this or other passages.

d) Heb 6:16

The committee preferred “and for them an oath sworn for confirmation is an end of every dispute.” over the RSV translation “Men indeed swear by a greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.” This is closer to the text wherein (peras)
(*pasēs antilogias*.)

The ESV translates “For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation.”

e) Heb 9:22

The RSV translates “and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.” The committee recommended simply “there is no forgiveness” as “of sins” is not in the text.

The ESV translates “and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”

Conclusion: In two of the five texts selected for comparison, the ESV makes notable improvement over the RSV translation.

3.0 Conclusions

3.1 Summary

3.1.1 Strengths

Our preliminary comparison with the old RSV reveals the ESV to be stronger in two key areas:

- i. **overall theology.** This can be seen in the ESV's treatment of the doctrine of the atonement, the divine nature of Christ etc. The ESV is clearly aware of the liberal influence present in the RSV and is to be commended for making significant improvement.
- ii. **principles of translation.** The ESV has a much greater respect for the Masoretic Text, the unity of Scripture etc. It shows greater reverence for Scripture as the *verbum Dei*.

3.1.2. Weaknessess

The ESV however also displays weaknesses in two key areas:

- i. **problems inherited from the RSV.** Some weaknesses with the RSV, in both text and translation, are not addressed. For instance, the ESV of Psalm 29:1 still reads "heavenly beings;" the ESV of 2 Chronicles 21:2 does not note that the Hebrew text actually reads "Jehoshaphat king of Israel." In 1 Samuel 13:1, the ESV, like the RSV, also leaves a "hole" in its translation: "Saul was ... ? years old when he began to reign, and he reigned ... and two? years over Israel."
- ii. **quality of translation.** When it departs from the RSV, the ESV does not always show great skill. Consider, for instance, the ESV of Exodus 21:22 – "when her *children* come out." More examples could be given where the translation of the ESV is somewhat awkward and unwieldy.