

Report to
General Synod
Abbotsford 1995

NASB, NIV, or NKJV:

Which Version Now?

from the

Committee on Bible Translations

appointed by Synod Lincoln 1992
of the Canadian Reformed Churches

Committee on Bible Translations
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1.0 Introduction

The mandate which this committee received from General Synod Lincoln 1992 reads as follows:

Synod decide:

- B. To continue the Committee with the following mandate:
 1. To do a comparative study of the NASB, NIV and NKJV, making use of past studies, in order to determine which one translation can be positively recommended for use by the churches, whereby the criteria are: faithfulness to the original text and linguistic character of the translation.
 2. To investigate the direction of the Bible Societies/Publishers behind different translations and whether there is the possibility to suggest improvements in the translation to the Bible Societies/Publishers which can be incorporated into future editions; as well, to investigate the future availability of the translations.
 3. To give due consideration to the decision of Synod Bedfordale 1992, regarding Bible translations.
 4. To report to the churches and Next General Synod six months prior to the next General Synod (*Acts*, article 35, p.22).

In the two and half years that the committee had to fulfill its mandate, it met twelve times. That number in itself is not indicative of the effort put in, however, for between meetings individual members of the committee spent countless hours reading, researching and preparing reports, as is evident from the appendices which form part of this report. Each of these appendices was submitted to the committee by its individual members; it should be noted that the positions taken therein are more than just the opinions of individuals since through the process of mutual scrutiny, discussion and adoption, only that which met with common agreement was allowed to stand. Careful readers will notice some overlap in the various reports; to conserve time and effort however,

that overlap has been allowed to stand. The appendices display something of the depth to which we have wrestled with the issues that Bible translation presents. This report, intentionally kept as brief as possible, will attempt to convey the results.

To put the matter in perspective from the outset, it is good for the churches to realize that in a certain respect our situation is a happy one. The Synod of our Australian sister churches spoke words that we unanimously agree with when they declared already in their 1990 synod “that the NASB, NKJV and NIV are deemed better translations than the RSV” (article 138, p. 95). It was heartwarming for us to discover also through the process of studying these three translations in light of the synod decisions made before with respect to the RSV, that indeed “the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all better than the RSV according to the criteria that were used over the years to judge the RSV” (see Appendix 5, § 3.1 and § 3.2).

The fact that our mandate was to “determine which *one* translation can be positively recommended for use by the churches....” added a degree of pressure to our research and our discussions. With a view to the riches before us and the plethora of angles and factors involved, the task of recommending *one* translation often seemed quite impossible.

It is no shame for us to admit that for all of us on the committee, the process in coming to what we may now present to you was a learning one. We may state here that we went into the task with a degree of pessimism about the possibility of fulfilling our mandate. We were determined to do justice to all the various aspects and to go in whatever direction that investigation would lead us. We did not know what the final result would be.

2.0 Faithfulness to the Original Text and Linguistic Character of the Translation

Synod 1992 gave us the mandate to do a comparative study in which the criteria are (a) “faithfulness to the original text” and (b) “linguistic character of the translation.” In points 1 and 2 below, we will examine especially the aspect of “faithfulness to the original text,” and in point 3, the matter of the “linguistic character of the translation” will be examined. Throughout the remainder of the report, these two aspects are generally considered together as they are of course integrated and often influence each other.

2.1 Authority of Scripture

In determining faithfulness to the original text, the question has to be raised how the translators first of all view that text. Is there respect for the infallibility and the divine authorship of Holy Scripture? It should be noted that with respect to this significant point, there is much to be thankful for with respect to the stated intentions and positions of those involved in the translating process of all three versions before us.

In the Foreword to the *New American Standard Bible*, the Lockman Foundation states that the NASB “has been produced with the conviction that the words of Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew and Greek were inspired by God.” One of their chief purposes also was “to adhere as closely as possible to the original languages of the Holy Scripture.”

Likewise, as the preface to the *New International Version* indicates, also those involved in this translation “were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God’s Word in written form.” Before commencing their work, translators had to affirm that they agreed that “the Bible alone, in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs,” and that they held to a high view of Scripture as set forth in the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Belgic Confession, and the Statement of Faith of the National Association of Evangelicals.¹

The Preface to the *New King James Bible* also claims that “the translators, the committees, and the editors” have adhered “faithfully to the Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek texts”; like those involved with the King James Bible “their reverence for the divine Author and His Word assured a translation of the Scriptures in which only a principle of utmost accuracy could be accepted.” It is said that all participants signed “a document of subscription to the plenary and verbal inspiration of the original autographs of the Bible.”²

The reader is referred here to the pertinent remarks by Dr. J. van Bruggen to the effect that faithful translation work can only be done by

¹ As noted by Robert G. Bratcher, “The New International Version,” *The Word of God: A Guide to English Versions of the Bible*. Edited by L.R. Bailey (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 153, and by C.J. Youngblood in “The New International Version Translation Project: Its Conception and Implementation” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (Vol. 21, no.3, September 1978), 245.

² Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 330.

those who “have spiritual insights which only the Holy Spirit can give” (see appendix 1, § 6). The failure to accept the authority of the Scripture unconditionally will at times be influential on the resultant translation.

When one bears in mind that the *Revised Standard Version* appears to come from a different perspective,³ it is apparent that also in this respect the churches will soon be in a better position regardless of which of these three translations they now choose.

2.2 Original Text

With respect to the Old Testament text, the textual basis behind the three translations before us is virtually the same. There may be some difference in degree as to how much the Dead Sea Scrolls and the ancient versions are used, but that would have to be judged on a text by text basis. The committee has no real concerns here. It should be said though that once again our situation is a pleasant one since none of these three translations resort to conjectural emendations as easily and unnecessarily as the RSV does. But more will be said about this point below.

There is more controversy regarding the textual basis of the New Testament however. A pertinent question here is: which text must be seen as original? Readers may be aware that in scholarly circles today there is debate as to whether preference should be given to (a) the Textus Receptus or the Majority Text⁴ of the New Testament, or (b) the eclectic text often referred to with the names Nestle-Aland. While the NASB and the NIV choose to follow the eclectic text, the New King James Version is based on the Textus Receptus; in fact, one of the guidelines translators had to keep in mind was that it had to “correct all departures from the Textus Receptus.”⁵ For more details about this matter and the continuing

³ Compare here *Acts of Synod Coaldale 1977*, Appendix IV, 76-77 which speak about the origin of the RSV in the National Council of Churches of Christ. See also our appendix 5, especially § 2.1.2.2.

⁴ It should be noted that, although often confused, the Majority Text is not the same as the Textus Receptus. The latter is the Greek text used as it was then available for the King James Version whereas the Majority Text refers to the text that would be arrived at by determining the consensus of the majority of the Greek manuscripts.

⁵ As quoted by A.L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition*, Second Edition. (Nashville: Nelson, 1989), 34. On the same page, Farstad quotes from the same document telling us “Because of the continued usage of the traditional text (*Textus Receptus*) and the increasing number of scholars who prefer the usually similar majority text supported by the vast

debate, we refer you to our appendix 4, “Which Text Type of the New Testament is Best?”⁶ For aspects of this matter relevant to the New King James Version, we refer readers to section 2.4.3 of this report. In the opinion of your committee however, the churches would do well not to get entangled in this point. For one thing, there is no unanimity here among scholars dedicated to the Reformed view of Scripture, and the debate is still continuing.⁷ Moreover, the differences are relatively minor; as the Australian committee reported to their synod in 1990, “scholars from all camps agree that 95-97% of the text is established without doubt or debate.”⁸ Regardless of which position is adopted, we still do have the true text of the New Testament before us. As even the preface to the New King James Version points out, “Bible readers may be assured that the most important differences in the English New Testament of today are due, not to manuscript divergence, but to the way in which translators view the task of translation...” Thus, in the considered opinion of your committee, the churches would do well to consider this matter in that perspective and therefore neither to accept or reject any translation simply on the basis of this point.

2.3 Linguistic Character of Translation

majority of manuscripts, it is important that a version of the Bible based on this text be available in current literary English.”

⁶ Also noteworthy is the article by Ralph Earle called “The Rationale for an Eclectic New Testament Text” in *The NIV: the Making of a Contemporary Translation*. Edited by K.L. Barker. (Col: International Bible Society, 1991), 53-57.

⁷ For a good review of the present state of the discussion, see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 37, no. 2 (June 1994). Wallace also includes an analysis of the position of Dr. J. van Bruggen as presented in *The Ancient Text of the New Testament* (Premier, 1979), and that of W.F. Wisselink who wrote a doctoral dissertation under J. van Bruggen entitled *Assimilation as a Criterion for the Establishment of the Text: A Comparative Study oin the Basis of Passages from Matthew, Mark and Luke* (Kampen: J.H.Kok, 1989). It is interesting that Wallace, although a student of Arthur L. Farstad and Zane C. Hodges (two defenders of the NKJV and the Textus Receptus/Majority Text view), suggests that the Majority Text position is possible though not probable (213).

⁸ “Report on Bible Translation,” *Acts of the 1990 Synod and Reports to the 1990 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia*, 130.

A considerable amount of our time was spent on the matter referred to in our mandate as the “linguistic character of translation.” The questions here are several: how accurate is a translation? How much freedom in translation is permissible? When does literalness sacrifice clarity? While all translation involves a certain amount of interpretation, how much interpretation is too much? How much emphasis should be placed on the receptor language? The various reports presented on the committee table and subsequently appended to this report (see especially appendices 1, 2, 3, and 5) attest to the amount of study devoted to this issue.

To summarize some of our studies, it should be pointed out that for a long time it has been popular to divide translations into two camps, namely, *formal equivalent* and *dynamic equivalent*. *Formal equivalent* refers to a method of translating in which priority is given to the forms, structure, and phrasing of the original language. *Dynamic equivalent* gives a higher degree of emphasis to the receptor language, with more emphasis on the equivalent meanings and less concern for the form and structure of the original. The difference here is not really a difference in kind, but rather one in degree with various translations seeking to place themselves differently (see figure 1 below). While helpful, this distinction between formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence can also be somewhat misleading. Our studies have shown that often translations which are considered to lean more to a formal view contain rather dynamic translations, and vice-versa. Rather than consistently maintaining one position, they are in actual fact unable to do so. The tendency to reject a certain translation because it is perceived as being in either camp is then also the result of misunderstanding. See also on this point appendix 3, § 3.1.

Figure 1

 formal equivalent

dynamic equivalent

Somewhat more helpful is the distinction made by Callow and Beekman between four types of translations, namely, highly literal, modified literal, idiomatic, and unduly free (see figure 2 below). A *highly literal translation* is then similar to that found in interlinear translations, which follow very precisely the word-order and sentence structure. While one might consider such a thing to be a translation tool, no one would consider it an acceptable translation.

Figure 2

unacceptable types			
acceptable types			
highly literal	modified literal	idiomatic	unduly free

At the other extreme, an *unduly free translation* would be a paraphrase approach in which there is undue freedom with respect to the historical context when referring to people, places, things, or customs. Here the translation “will misrepresent the original message and include extraneous, unnecessary information which the author did not intend in his writings.”⁹ Beekman and Callow point out that while both these methods are at opposite extremes, they “share the same unacceptable characteristic of failing to communicate what the original communicated.”¹⁰

Moving on to more acceptable types of translation, Beekman and Callow mention that the *modified literal translation* is an improvement over the highly literal as the translator realizes that some adjustment is needed. However, here the same grammatical forms are used, words are translated consistently regardless of various contexts, and the meaning is still not entirely clear. They point out that for a group of believers “who have access to reference works, and whose motivation to read and study is high, a modified literal translation is usable.”¹¹ For anyone else however much is still lost in the message and an *idiomatic translation* is what is really needed.

Concerning this last type, Beekman and Callow write:

In an *idiomatic translation*, the translator seeks to convey to the RL readers the meaning of the original by using the natural grammatical and lexical forms of the RL. His focus is on the meaning, and he is aware that the grammatical constructions and lexical choices and combinations used in the original are no more suitable for the communication of that message in the RL than are, say the

⁹ *Translating the Word of God*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 23.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

orthographic symbols of the original. The RL must be conveyed using the linguistic form of the RL.¹²

Does this mean that in translations of this type the form does not play a role? Concerning this, Beekman and Callow write:

The constant emphasis on *meaning* as over against *linguistic form* may have given the idea that the translator who translates idiomatically ignores the form of the original entirely. But this is not so. In the translation process, the linguistic form of the original is of primary and basic importance. Only from a careful study of the grammar and the lexicon of the original can a translator arrive at the meaning which he is to communicate in the RL version. This involves the process of exegesis which calls into use commentaries, lexicons, and other exegetical tools. Once the precise meaning of the original has been determined from the linguistic forms of the text, then the translator is ready to look at the grammar and lexicon of the RL to choose a form which will convey the same meaning. The form is likely to be different, but basic to the form chosen in the RL is the meaning of the original which, in turn, is derived from the form of the original. The linguistic form of the original thus lies at the heart of all translation work.¹³

It is interesting in this regard to listen to one of our own voices of the previous generation. In our third appendix, we have given attention to the assessment of the late Professor B. Holwerda in the matter of Bible translations. For our purposes here, it may be beneficial to point out that Holwerda too states that he is not against a “somewhat free” translation, for he says: “A literal translation is often literal, but not a translation. And the purpose is to have a good translation.”¹⁴ Commenting on the new Dutch translation, Holwerda stresses the need for a translation to be idiomatic.

¹² *Ibid.* “OL” here refers “original language,” the language of the original writer, and “RL” to the “receptor language,” the language of the one who receives the message.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 348.

¹⁴ *Populaire Wetenschappelijke Bijdragen* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1962), 77. The committee of our sister churches in Australia which reported to their 1990 synod also made reference to this work of Holwerda (cf *Acts and Reports 1990 of the Free Reformed Churchs of Australia*, 140). The translation used here and in what follows is theirs.

But at certain places this translation, though it wants to be a modern translation, has not freed itself from the Hebrew idiom. Thus one meets expressions which we do not use....I frequently find it somewhat stilted and antiquated, and a bit purposely dignified and solemn. And I think that without resorting to colloquial or slang expressions one simply could have and even should have used the common language of today somewhat more. It would not only have made the translation easier to read and more clear, but, on final analysis, would even have made it more accurate. THIS IS TRUE BECAUSE A CAREFUL PARAPHRASE IS SOMETIMES MORE ACCURATE THAN A LITERAL TRANSLATION.¹⁵

Earlier too, Holwerda had referred to the need for a translation to be *clear*, taking into account the language which we now speak and write. J.H. Skilton, a former Westminster Seminary professor, says it as well:

The preference of the present writer is for a translation which sticks close to its basic text and tries to conserve as much as possible of the details and background of the original, but which does not lose sight of the thought movement and remembers its responsibilities to the receptor language to produce a work that is intelligible, idiomatic, and felicitous.¹⁶

These are concerns and views which your present committee shares. As we as churches become increasingly anglicized with a second and third generation well schooled in the English language, there is a great need for us to have a translation which speaks the language of the man in the pew. It is possible to have the highest of regard for the original languages in which God caused His word to be written but at the same time strive to have a translation in our hands which is truly *English* as we speak it and write it also in other contexts.¹⁷

The appendices and the rest of the report will continue to deal with these issues (see especially appendix 3, § 3.1); for now this will have

¹⁵ Holwerda, *Ibid.*, 90 as translated in *Acts 1990*, 141 (emphasis is Holwerda's). After quoting these words, the Australian committee makes the comment that "this is in line with the dynamic equivalent method"; it would perhaps be more correct to say that this is in line with the idiomatic approach to translating.

¹⁶ "The Study of Modern English Versions of the New Testament," *The New Testament Student at Work*. Volume 2 of *The New Testament Student*. (Presb & Ref., 1975), 222.

¹⁷ For more on this concern, see section 2 of appendix 2, "The NIV - Balancing Fluency and Accuracy."

to suffice as an introduction to some of the complexities regarding the theory of translating.

The next question really is: where do the three translations before us attempt to stand in this regard? What principles do they attempt to work with and what goal are they headed towards?

2.3.1 The NASB in theory

The NASB, being a revision of the American Standard Version, is an attempt

to render the grammar and terminology of the ASV in contemporary English. When it was felt that the word-for-word literalness of the ASV was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom. In the instances where this has been done, the more literal rendering has been indicated in the margin (*Preface*).

From brochures which we have received directly from the publisher of the NASB, the Lockman Foundation, we can glean much about their goals and intentions with this version of the Bible. The one pamphlet, entitled "New American Standard Bible: Translation Facts," tells us that

The New American is a *literal* translation which gives the biblical meaning in the framework of a word for word rendering. It is known as a more precise translation because of its faithfulness to the original manuscripts, even to such details as sentence structure, word order, and conjunctions. The attention to formal detail emphasizes and accents the expression of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts.

Another pamphlet, entitled "Translators of the New American Standard Bible," tells us

The translators did not attempt to interpret Scripture through translation. Instead, the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE translation team adhered to the principles of literal translation. This is the most exacting and demanding method of translation, requiring a word for word translation that is both accurate and readable. This method follows the word and sentence patterns of the original authors in order to enable the readers to study Scripture in its most

literal format and to glimpse the individual personalities of the original authors. For example, one can directly compare and contrast the simple eloquence of John with the deep complexity of Paul. Instead of telling the reader what to think, the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE gives the reader the best translation with which to conduct a personal journey through God's Word.

2.3.2 The NIV in theory

The Preface to the translation is once again the first place to look for its stated goals and methods. There we learn the following.

The first concern for the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words.

After mentioning that a number of stylistic consultants were involved in the process, we are told more about the goals.

Concern for clear and natural English — that the New International Version should be idiomatic but not idiosyncratic, contemporary but not dated — motivated the translators and consultants. At the same time, they tried to reflect the differing styles of the biblical writers.

From its promotional literature, this is further clarified. After speaking about different methods ranging from the concordant to the paraphrastic, we are told about the NIV's approach.

As for the NIV, its method is an eclectic one with the emphasis for the most part on a flexible use of concordance and equivalence, but with a minimum of literalism, paraphrase, or outright dynamic equivalence. In other words, the NIV stands on middle ground - by no means the easiest position to occupy. It may fairly be said that the translators were convinced that, through long patience in seeking the right words, it is possible to attain a high degree of faithfulness in

putting into clear and idiomatic English what the Hebrew and Greek texts say. Whatever literary distinction the NIV has is the result of the persistence with which this course was pursued.¹⁸

2.3.3 The NKJV in theory

From the preface to the the New King James Version, it is apparent that those involved in this major revision hold the work of the translators of the King James Version in highest esteem. Because they acknowledged the authority of the Word, they were very careful to be accurate and maintain the strictest attention to the letter of the text. Thus it is said in the preface to the NKJV that

special care has also been taken in the present edition to preserve the work of *precision* which is the legacy of the 1611 translators.

Where new translation has been necessary in the New King James Version, the most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.

Whereas the phrase “*dynamic* equivalence” is characteristic of some translations, the operative word with respect to the NKJV is the word “complete.” The theory behind it is what the New King James translators call “complete equivalence.”¹⁹ In a book which describes the accuracy, beauty and completeness of the NKJV, one finds chapters called “Complete Old Testament Textual Data,” Complete New Testament Textual Data,” and “Complete Equivalence in Translation.” In the last chapter, after putting down the *literal* method of translating because of its supposedly *formal* correspondence with the original language, and putting down the *dynamic* method because of its supposedly subjective elements, we are presented with the *complete equivalence method*. We are told that “complete equivalence is basically *the literal method*

¹⁸ *The Story of the New International Version*, (N.J.: International Bible Society, 1978), 12 - 13.

¹⁹ Cf the booklet by the O.T. executive editor, James D. Price, *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation*, Nashville: Nelson, 46 pages.

updated to include scientific insights from *linguistic analysis*.²⁰ Summarizing this method, James Price writes:

Modern research in structural linguistics has revealed the importance of syntactic structures. A great deal of the information contained in a phrase, clause, or paragraph is encoded in its syntax. Translations that do not produce structural equivalence as well as semantic equivalence have failed to reproduce important information.²¹

2.4 The Practice

After having investigated the stated intentions and goals of the various translations, there remains of course the need to examine the degree to which they have been attained and whether the result is satisfactory. The question really comes down to faithfulness and readability. Is the degree of accuracy so high that we have no doubt that with which we are presented is the Word of God Himself? Is it phrased in such a way that it is highly readable for the purposes of church, home, and school?

In order to gauge answers to those questions, we have done a number of text studies. Time limitations allowed us to choose only some chapters of Holy Writ in a random manner, usually in connection with other studies that individual committee members were occupied with. On that basis, our conclusions are as follow.

2.4.1 The NASB in practice

With respect to the matter of faithfulness to the original languages, we have a lot of admiration for this translation. Often a reader can judge what is happening in the original language by referring to the

²⁰ Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition*, (Nashville: Nelson, 1993), 124

²¹ As quoted in *Ibid* (124-5) from an unpublished monograph on Bible translating by J. Price. More often in this book (e.g., 100, note 3) there are references to unpublished works by Price on the theory of translating behind the NKJV. Other than his brochure called *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation* quoted above, there is to our knowledge no scholarly material on the method of translating supposedly used in this version. That which has been made available is not sufficient to convince us that that this method is so superior to others (for more on this see our appendix 1, § 11).

NASB. The noting system (in the *Reference Editions*) is also very extensive, giving many meanings that are even more literal as well as many further text references.²² While it would of course be possible to bring up references to texts where one would disagree with the translation, it cannot be doubted that the NASB is an accurate, reliable translation.

It should be noted however that the NASB has not consistently followed this literal approach. In Appendix 3 § 2.1, we have noted some examples of texts where the NASB is surprisingly free and less accurate. It is however with respect to its clarity and readability that the NASB is too often found wanting. The translation is simply too stiff, not lucid enough, and fails to use words the way they are used today. Proper sentence structure is often lacking. Young people would encounter numerous unnecessary problems in reading this translation; even adults often will not grasp its meaning. The fact that it does not arrange the text in a paragraphed manner but treats every verse as a separate unit starting again at the beginning of the page every time even further detracts from its readability.²³ Thus, we have great difficulty in positively recommending this translation *as the one translation* to be used by the churches. That does not mean that it should not be used. On occasion, the NASB has distinguished itself in providing idiomatic translations. The reader who cannot read the original languages, as well as the reader who can, will find this translation very helpful in studying God's Word. But for reading in other contexts, it simply lacks sufficient fluency and clarity.

We should note that this judgement also agrees with that of previous committees. The majority report of the deputies who reported to synod 1980 also came to the conclusion that "the NASB is often too literal to be lucid and clear, and does not render itself suitable for liturgical use."²⁴ More about this is mentioned in Appendix 3, § 3.3.1.

This judgement also agrees with that of our Australian sister churches. The Committee reporting to Synod 1990 said:

Putting it quite simply: the NASB's wooden style, lack of clarity and poor readability are its major drawbacks....

²² It should be pointed out however that not all editions of the NASB make this available. One needs to look specifically for a "Reference Edition" of the NASB.

²³ It should be noted though that "paragraphed" editions have been printed by Holman Bible Publishers. But this is not generally the policy of the Lockman Foundation and one has to specifically search for such an edition.

²⁴ *Acts of General Synod Smithville 1980*, 232.

Is the NASB a valuable translation of the Scriptures? The answer must be 'Yes'. But its value lies not in its potential as a family, Church or school Bible. It is a reliable translation which provides valuable information to anyone studying the Scriptures. Its aim of staying close to the Greek and Hebrew provides the attentive student (whether theologian or 'layman') with a wealth of information about original languages, and a useful check on other more idiomatic translations such as the RSV or the NIV. This is where its strength lies.²⁵

For more on the Australian analysis of the NASB, please see Appendix 3, § 3.3.2.1.

2.4.2 The NIV in practice

There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that of the three translations put before us, the New International Version presents us with the best and the most modern English. For its readability and its clarity, this translation deserves much praise. Here is language those in pew will have little difficulty understanding; nor does it take much to warm the hearts of children to its word usage.

It is the question of accuracy that has kept us busy however. Is this translation accurate enough or its translation methodology such that there simply is too much freedom taken with the text? As a result of a great deal of study of the translation and also the theory of translation however (as reflected in appendices 1, 2, and 3, and in § 2.3 above), there are several points which should be noted.

i. The NIV has wrestled to a greater degree with the need for clarity in translation, as Professor Holwerda has urged (see § 2.3 above). It has attempted to strike a balance between a high degree of faithfulness to the text and clarity for the receptor in the best possible English.

ii. The NIV is a fresh translation of the Bible. Unlike the NASB and the NKJV, which are revisions of existing translations, the NIV has been willing to look at the text anew and follow it rather than tradition, if necessary. We noticed this throughout our studies and have taken note of it in the conclusions to our study on Hosea, (cf. appendix 14, § 4 ii. c.).

iii. That does not mean it is a perfect translation. There are no perfect translations. We have found occasions when the NIV is more free

²⁵ *Acts of the 1990 Synod and Reports to the 1990 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of Australia*, 150-1.

than we believe to be acceptable and on these points the translators really should be called to account on the basis of their own commitment to the authority of Scripture.

iv. It should be noted however that both as committee and as individuals it was frequently our experience that very often when our initial reaction to an NIV translation was negative, further study and investigation convinced us that the NIV translators had taken into account all the factors involved and had actually rendered the best possible translation of the three versions. If it is true that the NIV has a reputation for being too free, this is no doubt partly due to the fact that the resources and abilities to check out the readings are not always present. Among others, the examples discussed under § 3.2 in Appendix 3 serve to illustrate this point.

v. In light of the above, it is not correct to say the NIV is a “dynamic equivalent translation.” Whereas an undisciplined use of the dynamic equivalence method can lead to outright paraphrases such as *The Good News for Modern Man (Today’s English Version)*, the *Living Bible*, etc.,²⁶ the New International Version makes only cautious use of this method and has no intention of being a dynamic equivalent translation (see § 2.3.2 above). Our text studies also confirm that in practice it does not predominantly follow this approach (see appendices 10 - 17). The NIV undoubtedly has dynamic equivalent aspects within it, as do the other translations (cf. appendix 3, § 2.1 and 2.3); but again, that does not make it a dynamic equivalent translation. Rather than belong in Beekman and Callow’s category of unacceptable types (unduly free), the NIV really has to be placed in the category of the acceptable types (modified literal or idiomatic). See § 2.3 above (figure 2).

vi. It should also be noted that in Christian circles in general the NIV has met with a great deal of receptivity. This is a version that has shown its staying power as opposed to so many others that have risen only to disappear from sight shortly thereafter. Moreover, it is apparent as well from the reviews that we have received that the NIV also has a high degree of respect in scholarly circles. Biblical scholars clearly acknowledge that this is a translation that must be reckoned with.

In conclusion, perhaps the best we can do is consider the words of one of our reports to the effect that the NIV

²⁶ It is important to remember, for example, that when Dr. J. van Bruggen in *The Future of the Bible* (Nelson, 1978) critiques dynamic equivalent translations he has especially these latter versions in mind rather than the NIV.

is simply the finest translation when all the criteria and the relative importance of the different factors are taken into consideration. Furthermore, this translation takes all of Scripture into account and is true to the Word of God.

The clarity and readability of the NIV may spark a renewed interest in personal Bible reading and study among young and old and stimulate anew the exploring of the treasures of God's Word. It is somehow difficult to imagine the English of the NASB and NKJV sparking that kind of response.²⁷

2.4.3 The NKJV in practice

To a great extent, what was said about the NASB can be said about the New King James Version. On the one hand, here is a version of the Bible which attempts to be literal and faithful to the Scriptures. But again, in terms of its clarity and readability it falls short. The English language is given a form which our membership is simply not used to speaking or writing. In our limited studies, we even encountered sentences which were simply considered 'bad' English. The sentence structure as well is often much too complex, bound too much to the structure of the original language and even to the English of the King James Version, giving us a form of English which is not spoken today.²⁸ As in most NASB editions, verses begin anew every time rather than being arranged in a paragraph format. In short, there are simply too many factors here which reduce clarity and readability. The comment of J.P. Lewis is to the point:

One must ask while noting the undeniable improvements of the NKJV over the KJV, 'Why stop here with a new old English? Why not come to current English?' One cannot put gingerbread on a Gothic structure and still have the original. Why create something which is unlike the way English-speaking people ever expressed themselves?²⁹

²⁷ Appendix 3, § 4. vi.

²⁸ According to Farstad, *Op.cit.*, 34, guideline number 9 was "attempt to keep King James word order. However when comprehension or readability is affected transpose or revise sentence structure."

²⁹ *The English Bible: from KJV to NIV*, 339.

The nature of the English presented in the NKJV must indeed be seen as a major obstacle. This translation does not go out of its way to be understood by the average person today; rather it has attempted to maintain expressions which are barely understood today and almost antiquated. If this generation would choose to adopt the NKJV, it is pretty well certain that the next generation will need to make yet another change as it finds that words which were barely understood before have now become entirely obscure. For what purpose, we might ask, must we make this sacrifice of clarity? Is an old English style more sacred than that which we speak today? Paul and John and the other authors did not speak antiquated Greek, but the Greek of their day, did they not? Sven Soderlund put it well when he commented that the English of the NKJV is “a curious mixture of Elizabethan style with glosses of twentieth century vocabulary and grammar.”³⁰ Rev. G. Van Dooren as well, already pointed in 1983 to several instances of what he called awkward style, difficult, and old-fashioned English which added to his conclusion that we do not need this translation of the Bible.³¹ It should be remembered that also the 1989 Report to Synod 1990 of our Australian sister churches was very critical of the NKJV on this point, referring to criticism that it had “about the method of translation, the mixed word usage, and the stilted sentence structure which together make us conclude that it can hardly be called a modern translation.”³² For more on this point, and a lengthy quotation of archaisms, see our appendix 3, § 2.3. For a summary of reviews on the NKJV, see appendix 3, § 3.4.3. It is apparent from the reviews summarized there that the NKJV has not met with much appreciation in scholarly circles. A community such as ours which demands and is used to a high degree of scholarship, should have a Bible which ranks accordingly.

Several other factors prevent your committee from recommending the NKJV. One factor is that the NKJV was not produced for such needs as exist in our churches. Our study in appendix 10 points out that the NKJV is expressly intended to satisfy the needs of those who cling to the KJV. This explains many of those peculiarities of the NKJV which make it unsuitable for our churches. While it is apparent that the NKJV attempts to make good use of modern scholarship, it is clear that many judgements were

³⁰ Review of the NKJV in *Crux* 16 (June 1980), 32 - 32.

³¹ “Bible Translation Number One Hundred: An Evaluation of the New King James Version,” *Clarion*, Volume 32, no. 15-18.

³² *Acts and Reports of the 1990 Synod*, 156. Compare also our Appendix 3 § 3.3.2.2., and our Appendix 10.

made for the simple reason that the KJV had it that way. None of the four revision of the KJV since 1769 have adhered so closely to the original KJV.³³ The NKJV was seriously limited by policy to change the archaic language of the KJV.

What the NKJV has in common with the KJV (and therefore, what exclusively distinguishes it from the four revisions after 1769) is that it adheres to the Textus Receptus of the New Testament (see on this point § 2.2 above). It should be noted that if in every other respect, the NKJV is considered a good translation, this point will not be decisive. But one will only be able to overlook the negative factors if he shares the high esteem that the Textus Receptus has been given in this translation. Yet, the Textus Receptus does not warrant such esteem. There is something doctrinally askew in the discussion about much of this. The period of history in which the King James arose is set aside as a period when special providence and grace were given with respect to the textual basis for the translation work as well as the gifts needed in rendering the translation. Daniel B. Wallace says: “The overarching concern of traditional-text advocates has been to maintain the concept of providential preservation.”³⁴ “Their entire doctrinal position,” writes Wallace, “is founded on what they think God must have done.”³⁵ He refers to J.W. Burgon who argued that there is “no reason for supposing that the Divine Agent, who in the first instance thus gave to mankind the Scriptures of Truth, straightway abdicated His office; took no further care of His work; abandoned those precious writings to their fate.”³⁶ It seems that alongside the divine inspiration of the original writings of the Bible, there seems to have been a period so divinely enlightened that the text and the gifts the church had at that time are unequalled in any period since. Needless to say, there is something very speculative and arbitrary about this. Who is to say that the work of one group of people is so sufficiently from God that it must remain untouched by succeeding generations, while the work of another is not? Even if one grants that there has been a *providentia specialissima* with

³³ In our studies on Hosea, we also noted a “slavish following of the so-called King James tradition”; see Appendix 14 § 4 ii b. It should be noted that in the literature however, they do warn against “excessive veneration of the KJV,” and against considering it either “inspired” or “infallible.” It leads one to wonder then why more was not changed in the NKJV.

³⁴ *Op. cit.*, 197. It should be noted that Wallace does point out that Dr. J. van Bruggen and his student, W. F. Wisselink, do not adhere to this doctrine of preservation but hold to a more ‘nuanced MT position’ 200, 201n97.

³⁵ *Op. cit.* 202.

³⁶ *The Traditional Text of the Holy Gospels Vindicated and Established* (London: George Bell, 1896), 11.

respect to the Word of God, who is to say that this special providence stopped in the seventeenth century?

However, this does not reflect the whole problem in relation to the Textus Receptus. The Textus Receptus is not the Majority Text. The Textus Receptus *resembles* the Majority Text, yet it departs from it significantly. The text of *Revelation* for instance, has many different readings in the Textus Receptus compared to that of the Majority Text. Another example is the famous *Comma Johanneum* (I John 5:7-8) which is part of the Textus Receptus, but not of the Majority Text.³⁷ Today there is almost unanimity that these words do not belong. They are not found in any of the early manuscripts. They are not found in the original Latin versions made by Jerome. They are only found in four late manuscripts which are considered Greek translations of a later version of the Vulgate (at least in one case, probably made to satisfy the promise of Erasmus that he would add them if he was shown a Greek manuscript which contained them).³⁸ (On I John 5:7-8, see also Appendix 3 § 3.4.3, and Appendix 5 § 2.1.1.1.i)

While we would not necessarily criticize the NKJV for its desire to fill the need of those who still adhere to the KJV, we have reservations concerning its choice of NT text: the Textus Receptus. We may discuss the merits of the Majority Text versus the Eclectic Text, but none in our churches will raise the Textus Receptus to this level.

All in all, while we recognize that there are good qualities about the NKJV, and realize that our Australian sister churches would like us to go in this direction (see in § 7.0 below), we find that we cannot share their enthusiasm sufficiently to do so. The Canadian Churches have always kept away from the NKJV and have never mandated any synod committee to study it before; whatever strengths the NKJV has are more than adequately shared by the translation that has had our attention before, the NASB; we see no compelling reason why we should recommend a change in that course now.

3.0 Matters of Style

The translation of the Bible, just as the publishing of any book, necessitates some editorial decision regarding style. Some of these are relevant to our report. While our appendix 7, “Notes on Style,” speaks

³⁷ *The Greek New Testament According to the Majority Text*. Edited by Zane C. Hodges and Arthur L. Farstad (Nashville: Nelson, 1982).

³⁸ See here B. M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, (Oxford, 1973), 101f. Also Ralph Earle, *Op.cit.*, 56-7.

about them at length, it may be beneficial if we summarize some of its points here. We do so especially with a view to our final recommendations.

- A. *Capitalization.* As there is nothing in the original languages which necessitates capitals for God and since the concern for capitalization in references to God (pronouns, adjectives) is a relatively new phenomenon, it is inappropriate to object when a translation minimizes the use of these. In many respects, this is to be preferred since it reduces a number of other problems that arise when there are inconsistencies or when there the need for interpretative decisions arise (e.g. the designation of Messianic prophecies). Cf. appendix 7, § 1.1 - 1.3.
- B. *“Thee” and “Thou” for God.* While many in our membership will lament the elimination of such terms for God, there is again nothing in the original language that necessitates them. We should not insist on maintaining them nor oppose their inevitable demise. Both the NIV and the NKJV have opted for the use of “you” and “your” for God, and it is can be expected that the NASB will do the same in its next edition. As the former committee put it before Synod 1992 regarding the NRSV: “it must be noted that in none of the original languages of Scripture is any linguistic distinction made between addressing a human being and addressing God. Since Biblical usage is our norm, one cannot have principle objections against the deletion of these archaic forms.”³⁹ Cf. appendix 7, § 1.4.
- C. *Italics.* Both the NASB and the NKJV have decided to make use of italics in order to designate words which are supposedly not found in the Hebrew or Greek but needed for the English. This too is a relatively recent practice, and presents more problems than it solves. For one thing, since italics are used in English for emphasis, their usage will confuse the average reader. Moreover, if the word is needed to make the sentence intelligible in translation, is it not then implicit in the original language? And if so, do the italics then not introduce doubt into the mind of the reader concerning words which might be beyond doubt? In our estimation then, a policy which eliminates the italics for this purpose and simply attempts to cover every aspect in the text is preferable. Thus, the approach of the NIV is to be preferred over that of the NASB and the NKJV. Cf.

³⁹ *Acts Synod Lincoln 1992, 252.*

appendix 7, § 2.1. On the use of italics by the NKJV for italics to designate OT quotations in the NT, see appendix 7, § 2.2.

- D. *Red Letter Editions.* This practice too is an artificial intrusion into the Biblical text. It introduces an erroneous distinction between the words of Jesus and the Gospel writers. Are they not all the Word of God? The publishers of all three versions have produced red letter editions, but black letter editions are available. We would urge the membership to take the extra effort to obtain these instead. Cf. appendix 7, § 3.0.
- E. *Paragraphs and Verses.* The NASB and the NKJV have both had the policy to treat every verse as a separate paragraph and note new paragraphs with bold numbers. This does not make for smooth reading. In later editions both translations became available in paragraphed format but once again one might need to make specific requests. Here as well the approach of the NIV is to be preferred. Cf. appendix 7, § 4.0.

4.0 Past Studies

The mandate of our committee included the directive to “do a comparative study of the NASB, NIV and NKJV, *making use of past studies...*” We have understood the phrase “past studies” here to refer to the work of previous synodically appointed Bible translation committees. In appendix 5, we have done an extensive investigation to see how the NASB, NIV and NKJV measured up with respect to the criticisms that were raised against the RSV. The conclusion of this work reiterates what we have said in § 1.0, namely, that these three translations are better than the RSV. On almost all the points raised in this test, these three translations did very well. Moreover, in appendix 14, we have compared previous studies on the RSV text of Hosea with that of these three translations. Overagainst the RSV which made emendations to the Masoretic Text no fewer than 30 times (23 of them definitely unwarranted), the NASB, NIV and NKJV continued to be faithful to the text. Moreover, while the NASB and the NKJV stuck to the tradition of the KJV in some instances, the NIV did better in these instances and at other points came up with fine distinctive translations because of their willingness to look at the text afresh. In light of these facts too, the churches should have little hesitation in abandoning that which is ‘old’ in favor of that which is ‘new,’ since that which is ‘new’ is clearly better.

5.0 Common Objections to the NIV

It is no doubt true that any major new version of the Bible is going to meet with a certain amount of initial criticism. Even the translators of the King James Bible had to face this problem as they were accused of relegating correct renderings to the margin by those who stubbornly clung to the Geneva Bible, the Great Bible or the Bishops' Bible.⁴⁰ It is no different with the NIV today. J. P. Lewis mentions that "the NIV translators are now in the throes of that process."⁴¹

In order to try to serve the churches well, we have intentionally devoted some time and effort also to the voices that have been raised against the NIV. It became important for this committee to determine for itself: were these concerns legitimate? Are there objections which do stand up when they are carefully scrutinized? Also because one of these voices contributed to a shift in the Australian position (see § 7.0 below), we thought it best that we listen to the concerns he raised.

In appendix 8 then, we have examined the book *The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation*. The final conclusion of this book is that the NIV is not likely to become "the new standard which the church so clearly needs" and that "the New King James Version is superior to the New International Version."⁴² In other words, the NIV is to be rejected in favour of the NKJV. It should be pointed out however that the authors of this book can hardly be considered objective judges in the matter since both of them have been involved in the work of the NKJV. Earl D. Radmacher has served on the North American Overview Committee and Zane C. Hodges acted as a translator and a consultant.⁴³ We tested this book by examining one chapter in detail. The result of that process however was that it convinced us that the book really lacked credibility. Their strong bias for the NKJV has caused them to make many unfair accusations, to level many exaggerated charges, and to turn a blind eye at the same time to

⁴⁰ S.L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, 1525-1611," *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, volume 3. Edited by S.L. Greenslade. (Cambridge, 1963), 167-8. Cf. F.F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English* (3rd ed., Oxford, 1978), 106-7.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, 328.

⁴² By Earl D. Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges (Dallas: Redención Viva, 1990), 131-2

⁴³ Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James in the Great Tradition*, (Nashville: Nelson, 1989) 146, 155.

similar difficulties in the KJV or the NKJV. The level of scholarship presented in this book is certainly not impressive. We wonder whether this approach to the matter can even be considered Christian. It should serve as a warning to the churches to be wary of similar charges launched unfairly by those with ulterior motives.

In appendix 9, we have examined in detail another book which is critical of the NIV and has been quite influential in Australia (see § 7.2 below): Robert Martin's *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version*. Although less acrimonious, this book too is found wanting. Our appendix shows that his views are often simplistic, his demands extreme, and his concerns unrealistic. Our conclusion is that "Martin is not very helpful in assessing the NIV because his understanding of the process of translation is oversimplified and his criterion for a good translation is unbalanced." Cf. § 4.0. Once again we have a voice which is initially alarming but upon further investigation loses much of its substance.

It should also be mentioned that many of the other concerns that are often raised against the NIV need to be seen out of the perspective that the NIV has attempted to reach a better quality of English than many other translations. One might object, for instance, to shortening some of the longer Greek sentences.. Similarly, the omission of words like "but," "and," "for," etc. is particularly troubling to the reader who knows the original languages and recognizes behind them their original equivalent. The NIV translators would defend all this however, from the perspective of the nature of the English language. It is a rule in the English language that lengthy sentences be avoided — one sentence should contain basically one thought.⁴⁴ Likewise, in English it is considered improper to begin sentences with words like "but" and "for", etc; whereas they might add something to the Greek or Hebrew, if they do not add anything to the understanding of the English reader the rule is that they should be omitted. A key to lucid English is the omission of all unnecessary words. As committee, we have mixed feelings on this point. While the goal of high quality English is certainly laudable and it is good to realize that this is the NIV motive, we are not convinced that all of this is really necessary. This may very well be a matter for further study and review (cf. recommendation 3 in § 8.0).

6.0 The Bible Societies

⁴⁴ For translators' views on this point, see also footnote 10 of Appendix 9.

Included in our mandate is also point two:

To investigate the direction of the Bible Societies/Publishers behind different translations and whether there is the possibility to suggest improvements in the translation to the Bible Societies/Publishers which can be incorporated into future editions; as well, to investigate the future availability of the translations.

With respect to this mandate, we can report as follows.

6.1 New American Standard Bible

This version of the Bible has been sponsored by the Lockman Foundation, was first published in 1970, and by 1991 was said to have distributed more than sixteen million copies. While we expect that its popularity has decreased since then (partly on account of the appearance of the NIV), the Lockman Foundation continues to provide it, and apparently has plans for a minor revision. While of the three it may be the least popular in the bookstores, there is nothing to indicate that it will not continue to be available for some time. The Lockman Foundation has indicated that they are open to comments we might wish to make; by letter, they said “we welcome any suggestions and questions especially since we are in the process of a light revision of the NASB.”

6.2 New International Version

Of the three versions before us, the NIV is no doubt the translation that is the most readily available and strongest in the marketplace. The International Bible Society, dating back to 1809 (when it was called the New York Bible Society), has sponsored and financed this translation since 1968. Its printing is taken care of exclusively by Zondervan of Grand Rapids, Michigan. In February of 1993, Kenneth L. Barker, the Executive Director of the NIV Translation Center informed us in a letter that there are already 80 million copies in print and called it “the best-selling Bible today.”

The Society is also committed to revising the NIV from time to time; Dr Barker assured us “we would welcome comments and suggestions for improved translations that your committee might make in the future....”

6.3 New King James Version

This version developed out of a revision project set in motion in 1975 by Thomas Nelson Publishers. They claim that it is the first major revision of the KJV in 200 years.⁴⁵ No figures are available to us as to how successful it has been thus far. There is no executive committee with which we could correspond. We were informed by the publisher that the NKJV is a completed project. In our estimation, this is another reason why this translation should not be recommended to the churches.

7.0 Australia

Synod Lincoln 1992 also gave us the mandate “to give due consideration to the decision of Synod Bedfordale WA 1992, regarding Bible translations.” In what follows, we will attempt to give an overview of all the relevant decisions of our Australian churches regarding Bible translation. This will allow us to give the requested consideration to Synod Bedfordale and also to comment on decisions made since then. At this point, it would be good also to consider the overview given in Appendix 3, § 3.3.2.2.

7.1 Synod 1990

In 1987 a synod of the Free Reformed Churches appointed a committee with the mandate “to investigate once more the NIV and NASB and to investigate the New KJV to see if any of these translations would be better than the RSV.”

In a lengthy report, this **committee** reported to Synod Armadale 1990 of the Free Reformed Churches. With respect to the *NASB*, it reported that while the *NASB* was useful for study purposes, it was not suitable for worship and other general purposes. After evaluating the *NKJV* with respect to reliability and readability, the committee concluded that they could not recommend the New King James Version. Upon comparing the *NIV* with the *RSV* and giving consideration to its method of translating, the deputed recommended to synod 1990

⁴⁵ J. P. Lewis, *Op.cit.*, 329.

3. to declare at this time already that the NIV is deemed better than the RSV for use within the church;
4. to recommend to the churches that the NIV be used for study, instruction, and family purposes;
5. to withhold final endorsement of the NIV in the church services till a subsequent Synod;
6. to ask the new deputies to send all relevant suggestions and improvements to the Committee on Bible translation of the NIV.⁴⁶

In response to this report, **synod** 1990 declared “at this time already that the NASB, NKJV and NIV are deemed better translations at this time”; while this synod decided “as regards the underlying text, to accept the premise that there is room for a careful eclectic method,” it also decided “to express caution over the DE approach to translation.” Taking issue with the opinion of its committee that the NIV combines the formal equivalent and the dynamic equivalent approaches (consideration 4e⁴⁷), synod proceeded to appoint a new committee to further study the NASB and NKJV and to further evaluate the NIV.

7.2 Synod 1992

The **committee** appointed by Synod 1990 reported to Synod Bedfordale 1992. This committee basically agreed with the previous committee’s view on the *NASB* and therefore recommended that synod “omit the *NASB* from further consideration for use in the church services.”⁴⁸ On some points however, this committee disagreed with the previous committee’s assessment of the *NKJV*. It concluded here that

1. The *NKJV* is faithful to the form of the original.
2. This faithfulness to the form has result in some considerable losses in clarity in its language, though these losses are not as severe as in the *NASB*. Their extent merits further investigation.
3. The *NKJV*’s underlying text is of significant value. The translation’s fidelity gains to a major degree because it is a matter of safety to follow that long-established form of the text. Therefore it is worthy of serious consideration by the Churches.

⁴⁶ *Acts and Reports 1990*, 170.

⁴⁷ That this consideration also plays a large role later in the report to synod 1992 is obvious from page 115 and following of the *Acts and Reports 1992*.

⁴⁸ *Acts and Reports 1992*, 122

4. The extent to which the NKJV has made use of the textual scholarship of the last centuries needs further examination, especially as related to the OT.

Since our Synod 1992 gave us the mandate to give due consideration to Synod Bedfordale 1992, let us pause at this point to comment on some aspects of this committee's report. With respect to point 2 above, our experience is different. In our estimation the NASB is *more* readable than the NKJV. Point 3 is rather curious in light of synod 1990's conclusion with respect to the text that "there is room for a careful eclectic method" and in light of their own admission that "they are not competent to indicate the errors" in the passages "which deviate from the original Greek text."⁴⁹ In conclusion 3 of the above, the committee has apparently followed the line of reasoning which we have warned against in § 2.4.3, considering it a matter of safety to follow the long-established form of the text. Would it not also be possible that say that the basic text here is simply that which was available to the translators of the KJV?⁵⁰ This conclusion can only hold true if one either (i) proves that the Textus Receptus is the correct text or (ii) accepts the teaching that God has preserved only this particular text as the most authoritative by a special act of providence.⁵¹

We must pay attention yet to what this **committee** recommended to Synod Bedfordale 1992 with respect to the NIV. Mainly on the basis of the committee's uncritical acceptance of Robert Martin's analysis of the NIV (cf our Appendix 9 where it is shown that most of Martin's criticisms are unjustified), the committee recommended to Synod "to withhold final endorsement of a new translation until (a.) more study has been made of the NKJV, and (b.) a common approach with the CanRC has been effectively pursued." The committee then recommended that new deputies be appointed to accomplish this mandate.

Synod Bedfordale 1992, on that basis decided "to recommend to the churches that the NKJV be used for study, instruction and family

⁴⁹ *Acts and Reports 1992*, 111.

⁵⁰ S.L. Greenslade, for instance, before praising the translators of the KJV for their work, says: "their text was still poor, the New Testament not yet based on the chief uncials; their knowledge of Hebrew, for example of tenses and many idioms, was still defective and they had no papyri to help them with the Greek *koine*..." *Op.cit.*, 167.

⁵¹ It is beneficial to remember here that, as pointed out by D.B Wallace in footnote 34 above, J. van Bruggen and W. Wisselink, to whom this Australian report makes quite some reference, would not defend their Majority text views on this basis.

purposes,” and “to leave room for the use of the NKJV in the churches if consistories so wish,” but to “withhold final endorsement of the NKJV until the churches became more familiar with it and “more study has been made of the NKJV in comparison with the NIV.” Synod also appointed deputies with the primary mandate

- a. to continue studies of the NKJV, in comparison with the NIV, to determine whether the NKJV can be endorsed as a final recommendation to the churches. The areas of study should include:
 - whether Old Testament textual sources are properly used;
 - the extent and seriousness of the loss of reliability resulting from the chosen method of translation....
- d. to communicate this decision, together with the reports of deputies serving Synod 1990 and Synod 1992, to deputies from the Canadian Reformed Churches prior to their Synod in November 1992, urging the brotherhood in Canada to reach a similar decision.⁵²

We are appreciative of the cautious approach of the synod here in that it (a) withheld final recommendation of the NKJV until further study was made, and (b) wanted to maintain contact with Canada in order to come to similar decisions.

7.3 Synod 1994

As subsequent events are relevant to our purpose, it will be beneficial if we will also yet examine what has happened in Australia since 1992. Synod 1992 appointed the same brothers to a new committee. This committee also communicated with us in the fall of 1993, but unfortunately we had little to share at that point. We are grateful for the fact that they sent us a copy of their report to Synod 1994. In this report they made extensive study of chapters of Ruth, Zephaniah, and Zechariah, attempting especially to compare the NKJV and the NIV. It appears that through that work, they became more sympathetic towards the NIV and more critical of the NKJV. In their considerations, for instance, they comment

- e. All things being equal, the loss through simplification or paraphrastic interpretation is more serious than the loss through lack of clarity.

⁵² *Acts and Reports of Synod 1992*, p.84.

Generally, in the case of lack of clarity the original words in the text can still be traced back.

- f. On the basis of the material studied it appears that the losses in the NKJV due to lack of clarity are more frequent than the losses in the NIV due to simplification or paraphrastic interpretation. This implies that the NIV is not necessarily less reliable than the NKJV. In fact in many instances the NIV is more reliable than the NKJV.
- g. Both an interpretive translation and an unclear translation are misleading. People are led to believe that the Word of God says something which it in fact does not say.
- h. Because of the importance of having a clear translation in contemporary English - the NKJV is weak in this regard — the NIV remains a translation worthy of serious consideration for use in the churches, homes and schools....
- k. ...It would be unwise of the FRSA to make a definite choice of translation before it is clear what direction the CanRC will be taking. With the expertise available to them they may certainly help us come to a final conclusion.⁵³

Once again, we are thankful for many aspects of this report. The careful reader will understand that we do not agree with all aspects. It is not fair to refer to the NIV specifically as “paraphrastic” as it is far from that nor as “interpretive” since all translations need to be interpretive. Regarding ‘g,’ we should point out that there is a middle road between an “interpretive” and an “unclear” translation — namely one that attempts to be faithful to the text as it engages in interpretation and attempts to give the results of the process as clearly as possible. It is our view that, while the NIV is certainly not perfect in that regard, it has been more successful than the Australian reports appear to suggest. As argued above (§ 2.3.2), though initial impressions are sometimes negative, careful study reveals that more often than not, the NIV tries to take all factors into account.

What did **Synod 1994** do with the recommendation of this committee? While we have not yet received the official Acts, we have received a faxed copy of their decision. Because it may not yet be available, we include most of the text below.

3. to endorse the NKJV as a faithful and reliable translation for use in the churches, as well as for study, instruction and family purposes.
4. To allow the NIV to be used in the church services, and for study, instruction and family purposes.

⁵³ *Report to Synod 1994*, 19-20.

5. To allow a period of transition for the churches to move away from the RSV in two years.
6. To appoint new deputies with the following instruction:
 - a. to inform the CanRC of this decision and remain in touch with the Canadian deputies about developments there;
 - b. to inform the churches of developments in the CanRC;
 - c. to monitor developments with respect to the NKJV and the NIV;
 - d. to solicit from the churches comments on possible improvements on these translations for a possible reprint and to send these comments to the respective publishers;

FOUNDATIONS:

1. Our previous synods, have found the NKJV to be a faithful and reliable translation and have allowed the use of it in the churches. Synod 1992 withheld final endorsement of the NKJV in order to evaluate its reception in the churches. That the NKJV is well received is evident from the fact that some of the congregations in the federation already use the NKJV.
2. Since the weaknesses of NIV are the strengths of the NKJV (and vice versa) the NIV should be considered for the use in the churches, and as with the NKJV a period of evaluation should be given before final endorsement.
3. It is highly desirable that all the churches in the bond use the same translation of the Bible. However, since the question of which Bible translation to use is not one of principle but rather one of preference, room should be left in the churches for a degree of variation.

Allow us to make a number of comments on this decision. While we are thankful that the synod allowed the use of the NIV, it is regrettable that this synod did not heed more carefully recommendation 'k' of its committee but proceeded already at this point to "endorse" the NKJV. What is particularly striking is the strong language used here; the NKJV has not simply been recommended, but it has been endorsed. To the best of our knowledge, previous ecclesiastical assemblies have shied away from such strong terminology. What does that say, e.g. about the NKJV's policy on 1 John 5:7-8? What does that say to the person in the pew when a minister perhaps disagrees with that endorsed translation of a given verse of Scripture? Still today, e.g. it is a matter of debate whether any ecclesiastical assembly ever "authorized" the "Authorized Version," the KJV.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Cf. S. L. Greenslade who says "Strictly speaking, the Authorized Version was never authorized, nor were parish churches ordered to procure it," *Op.cit.*, 168.

In our estimation then, the report presented to the Australian Synod of 1990 stands out as a careful and thorough presentation, and the report presented to Synod 1994 was more favourable to the NIV than the 1994 synod decision suggests.

8.0 Recommendations

What course should the Canadian churches then follow? While it would be a fine thing if we could agree with the sister churches who speak our language, it is our conviction that the Canadian churches should stick to the course they were on. It is the NASB that has been studied by us over the years and has come to be known among us as a reliable translation. There is very little that the NKJV offers us that the NASB does not offer, and there are some aspects of the NKJV which continue to concern us. While in our estimation *both* the NASB and the NKJV are too literal for use in the worship services and many other contexts, Australia and Canada have agreed that the NASB is a translation that is helpful for study purposes. For other purposes, the NIV, while not perfect, has much to commend it, as this report and its many appendices have attempted to show. It is good to remember as well that according to many (see, for example, appendix 1 § 13), the NIV is in many respects very close to the RSV.

In the light of everything that has been submitted in this report and its appendices then, the committee appointed by Synod Lincoln 1992 recommends to Synod Abbotsford 1995 that synod

1. recommend the *New International Version* for use within the churches.
2. remind the churches about the usefulness of the *New American Standard Bible* for study purposes.
3. appoint a committee 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. This committee should also glean from previous synod reports as well as from this report and its appendices any recommendations for change which need to be presented to the NIV Translation Center.

Respectfully submitted by your Committee,
P. Aasman

J. Geertsema
W. Smouter
C. Van Dam
G. H. Visscher

Appendix 1

Dynamic Equivalence in the NIV?

An Examination of some Translation Principles¹

1. In the work of *the Bible societies*, “‘serving the churches’ is now subordinated to ‘serving the seventies.’...The emphasis is no longer one of merely distributing the Bible, but of putting across the ‘biblical message.’...The Bible societies...have taken upon themselves a roles that has until now been the province of the church: that of explaining the *meaning* of the Bible to the world (Jakob van Bruggen, 63-4).²
2. This emphasis on *the message* is the reason for dynamic equivalent translations. This goal of the dynamic equivalent method calls for a higher degree of interpretation in the work of translating since the cultural difference between the readers and listeners must be bridged (JvB, 63).
3. Whereas formerly there was a one-sided regard for the message that was to be transmitted, in the dynamic equivalent the emphasis is on how the message is connected with its *receptor*, whether the receptor is an individual or a group. Older translations took into account too little of the culturally and socially determined and limited nature of man. The needs of the receptor are now given priority over the original form of the message (JvB, 68-69, 76).
4. According to dynamic equivalent proponents, the biblical revelation is mainly a communication event; but before the church can repeat or re-enact the event, a process of *transformation* must take place. In this transformation process, the Bible is involved. The Bible interpreter must describe the communication of the biblical revelation in terms of its original cultural setting. Next, the message

¹ It should be remembered that this was one of our earliest papers, put forward for discussion purposes. Many of the concerns raised here have been examined in further detail in the report and/or the other appendices.

² *The Future of the Bible* (Nelson, 1978). All references denoted JvB are to this book.

must be transmitted to people who speak a completely different language and live in a totally different culture. The rest of the transformation process (the cultural adaptation) is the responsibility of the preacher. “The translation, therefore, calls for a finishing touch from the church, the intermediary of the Bible, the movement of faith” (JvB, 71-3).

5. *Evaluation.* “God’s revelation brings about communication, but it is misleading to describe it as merely a part of a culturally confined communication event.” The Bible is “the absolute revelation from heaven.” “The theory of dynamic equivalence does not take into full account the supernatural element in the entire process of God’s revelation.” The Word of God does not in the first place “demand a transformation to each age and culture, but the conversion of anyone who would understand”; thus, not the transformation of the world, but the conversion of the receptor. This dynamic equivalent ignores the fact that the Lord says in the Word that “He is not only addressing the original listeners, but a much wider audience extending over many centuries”(cf. Mic.1:2; 1 Pet.1:11,12; Rom.15:4) (JvB, 78-83; cf. summary, p.84).

6. *Characteristics of a Reliable Translation (according to J. van Bruggen)*
 - First task of translator is to *render the written Word of God as accurately as possible.* The translator should not attempt to mediate between God’s Word and modern culture, but only render and transmit.
 - Certain forms were used in the original (songs, prophecies, letters, sentences, clauses); thus *faithfulness to these forms* is important. Translator must render these forms as close as possible to the way they are in the original. Form is a matter of the author’s composition, his linguistic usage, and even his style. That faithfulness to form is not yet possible in many tribal languages does not mean that it should be neglected in the English language in which it is possible. To neglect this principle is to make a paraphrase rather than a translation. A restructured translation (paraphrase) obliterates the real historical distance between the apostles and prophets and ourselves, it makes the translator an exegete who binds the reader to his understanding of the text and leaves the church without a reliable translation.
 - *Clarity.* “We reject the modern tendency to sacrifice faithfulness to form to clarity for the readers, but we also reject conservative

tendencies to press faithfulness to form to such an extent that the receiving language becomes distorted and unclear” (cf. KJV: “...as consonant *as can be* to the original Hebrew and Greek.”).

- *Completeness.* All books of Bible should be included in editions published.
 - *Loyalty to the Text.* Translator must have spiritual insight which only the Holy Spirit can give. Dort: translator must be also endowed with godliness and familiar with doctrines of Scripture. “Whether one believes the Bible or not will affect the way a person translates some passages” (JvB, 35). “The Bible cannot be adequately translated on the basis of philology, which is divorced from theology and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the translator”(JvB, 54). These aspects are difficult to check of course. But the translation can be tested for its spiritual character: Does it enhance or retard a spiritual understanding of the text?
 - *Authority.* A translation has (internal) authority only to the degree that it transmits the revelation accurately, completely, and reverently. Translation should function like the original Word of God (not cultivating the attitude of “it’s only a translation”).
 - *Ecclesiastical Usage.* Language of the church should not be abandoned. One translation should be used both inside and outside the church. (JvB, pp. 97-142).
7. Much of what is said above applies to *other translations* than the ones we have been mandated to study. Van Bruggen has in mind especially *Today’s English Version* from which most of his examples come. Use of idiomatic English alone does not make a translation dynamic equivalent. J. H. Skilton says, for instance: “The preference of the present writer is for a translation which sticks close to its basic text and tries to conserve as much as possible of the details and background of the original, but which does not lose sight of the thought movement and remembers its responsibilities to the receptor language to produce a work that is intelligible, idiomatic, and felicitous.”³

³ “The Study of Modern English Versions of the New Testament,” *The New Testament Student at Work*. Volume 2 of *The New Testament Student*. (Presb & Ref., 1975), p. 222.

8. The *NIV* does not attempt to be a dynamic equivalent translation. An official publication of the International Bible Society states: “as for the *NIV*, its method is an eclectic one with the emphasis for the most part on a flexible use of concordance and equivalence, but with a minimum of literalism, paraphrase, or outright dynamic equivalence. In other words, the *NIV* stands on middle ground ...the translators were convinced that, through long patience in seeking the right words, it is possible to attain a high degree of faithfulness in putting into clear and idiomatic English what the Hebrew and Greek texts say.”⁴ Likewise, Herbert M. Wolf has shown also with many examples that while no version that aims at accuracy is eager to depart from a literal translation, at times accuracy demands that one moves away from a literal rendering.⁵

9. Robert Martin (on whom the second Australian report leans heavily) has suggested that despite this stated aim, the *NIV in practice* follows the dynamic equivalent approach. But does the rejection of a formal equivalent approach make one’s approach that of dynamic equivalent? Martin himself asserts that dynamic elements are found in every English version. Bob Sheehan has suggested that Martin fails to appreciate the complexity of the translation problems and for Martin to prove his point he would have to look at every translation choice rather than choosing selective examples.⁶ Another interesting test might be to survey the literature and determine whether any of the known proponents of the dynamic equivalent method are actually claiming that the *NIV* follows this method. Martin suggests that the *NIV* is inaccurate because 1. it eliminates complex grammatical structures, 2. it adds words in translation, 3. it omits words in translation, 4. it erodes the Bible’s technical terminology, 5. it levels cultural distinctions, 6. it presents the interpretation of Scripture as Scripture, and 7. it paraphrases the biblical text. It is only with respect to the last two that Sheehan becomes sympathetic to Martin’s concerns, stating that “the *NIV* too often allows the context to have too much control over the translation. This is a practice fraught with

⁴ *The Story of the New International Version*, 1978.

⁵ “When ‘Literal’ is not Accurate,” *The NIV: the Making of a Contemporary Translation*. Edited by K.L. Barker. (International Bible Society, 1991), pp.127-136. See our appendix 9 for a review of Martin which is more extensive and was prepared later.

⁶ See R. Martin, *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1989) and the review of this book by Bob Sheehan in *Reformation Today* (March-April 1990).

danger and tends to convey the theology of the translator rather than the original writer...A revised NIV should take a closer look at this..."⁷

10. Proponents of the New King James Version tell us that the *dynamic equivalent method* involves three stages.
- **Analysis.** This step consists of a thorough study of the message of the source language. Each word, phrase, clause and discourse must be evaluated in light of its context, syntax and structure.
 - **Transfer.** Second step is to transfer all the semantic information obtained to its equivalent in the receptor language.
 - **Restructuring.** The last step is to restructure the information transferred into phrases, clauses, and discourse in the receptor language.⁸

James D. Price tells us that this method is open to several subjective abuses. One is the fact that in the transfer stage, some passive/active adjustments are made; another is the adjustments suggested for coordination and subordination (e.g. "baptism of repentance" becomes "repent and be baptized").⁹ These subjective aspects make such translations appear like paraphrases. Price also criticizes the NIV for its consistent omission of transitional marks, particles, and conjunctions.¹⁰

11. The men behind the New King James Version, espouse "*the complete equivalent method*" as it was coined by Dr. James Price, the NKJV Old Testament Editor in discussion with the OT Executive Review Committee.¹¹ Price suggests that a "transformational grammar is an excellent model for developing a good theory of translation.... This grammar views language as having a small set of deep structures defined by phrase-structure rules that produce 'kernel sentences.' In addition, it views language as having a small set of transformations that operate on the kernel sentences to produce the surface structure of the language." "A good theory of translation", says Price, "consists of three grammars: (1) a grammar of the source

⁷ Sheehan, p.18. Cf. Bob Sheehan's *Which Version Now?* (Carey Publications) pp. 21-27. On this point and other points that Martin raises, see our appendix 9.

⁸ *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation*, (Thomas Nelson, 1987) p. 19-27.

⁹ p.24-27. Cf. p.31.

¹⁰ p. 27-36.

¹¹ Arthur L. Farstad, *The New King James Version in the Great Tradition* (Nelson, 1989), p. 124.

language, (2) a grammar of the receptor language, and (3) a transfer grammar...The transfer grammar defines the rules for transferring all the source information into its exact equivalent in the receptor grammar; no subjective 'adjustments' are permitted, only those defined by rules that accommodate the differences between the two languages."¹² According to Price, the NKJV follows such a "complete equivalent" approach and is a major step in this direction. Unfortunately, Price spends more time describing and criticizing the nuts and bolts of the dynamic equivalent method (which he believes the NIV follows) than he does telling us about the methodology of the complete equivalent approach. The preface to the NKJV tells us no more than that "the principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form. Through Price's own admission,¹³ it is clear that the complete equivalent has its origins in the same sources as the dynamic equivalent since Price too builds on the work of Nada and Taber and works as well with the notion of "transformation" and "transformational grammar." If one rejects the NIV for philosophical presuppositions which are supposedly rooted in the dynamic equivalent school (contrary to the NIV translators), a close analysis of the theories behind the NKJV might lead one to reject the NKJV for the very same reasons. The difference between these two translations may very well be a difference in degree rather than kind.

12. In discussions about translation theories, one often comes across the notion that the translation should have the same effect among receptors today as the original text first did and therefore there is the goal to make the present text as simple and clear as possible. It is good to remember however that in many cases it is likely that the first reader did not immediately understand everything that he read either. Tony Naden has made some perceptive comments in this regard. "This raises the question of whether the original Greek, Hebrew and Aramaic scriptures were 'clear' and 'meaningful' to contemporaries in the sense in which we sometimes interpret those terms. Did the average speaker of *koine* Greek find no difficulty in 2 Peter 2:4-9 or Romans 2:14-21? And if he did, is a non-difficult version of those passages a good translation? Did all the congregation of the Galatian church grasp the whole of Paul's letter

¹² Price, pp.37-39.

¹³ p.22. In Farstad's book, containing a chapter on Complete Equivalent in Translation, the same mistake is made (pp. 119-128). Price's pamphlet is summarized. We are not referred on to any more detailed works either.

to them when it was first read...?....to iron out everything in the Bible to a uniform easy cognitive intelligibility is surely to be guilty of a failure of translation principle.”¹⁴ This of course cuts two ways: translators must not make simple what God has left complex, nor bring in complexity where simplicity once was.

13. An aspect worth considering is one brought up by Robert G. Bratcher in his review of the NIV: “For those who are used to the Bible in the King James Version or the Revised Standard Version, this translation sounds like the Bible. The NIV is closer in style and form to the RSV than to any other English version....The principles that guided it in textual, exegetical, linguistic and stylistic matters are hardly distinguishable from those which guided the RSV.”¹⁵
14. It appears that a translation such as the NIV cannot be judged on the question whether it follows a “dynamic equivalent” approach or not. Ultimately, the question remains: how faithful is it to the original text? We would do well to spend time examining passages where it is suggested that the NIV has sacrificed accuracy for clarity.¹⁶

¹⁴ “Understandest Thou what Thou Readest?” *Bible Translator*. June 1982, as quoted in Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges, *The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh Look at a Popular Translation* (Redencion Viva, 1990), p. 91-2.

¹⁵ *The Word of God: A Guide to English Versions of the Bible*. Edited by Lloyd R. Bailey. (John Knox Press, 1982), p.165.

¹⁶ See footnote 1.

THE NIV: BALANCING FLUENCY AND ACCURACY

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-

As one studies the three translations (NASB, NIV and NKJV), one will agree with the broad consensus that the NIV stands apart from the NASB and NKJV. The NASB and NKJV are somewhat familiar in their diction, along the lines of the RSV and the KJV. But the NIV is new and contemporary; its turn of phrases is more natural. The NASB and NKJV together have the reputation of being more literal but at the same time more distant; the reputation of the NIV is that it is less literal but more natural.

Generally speaking, we favour a translation which is literal even though it is distant from normal English style, and we are averse to a translation which is less literal even though it may be more natural. But whatever reservations a person might have toward any of the three translations under investigation, it must be recognized that all three

translations were produced with a commitment to accuracy and faithfulness. Both sides were devoted to their own philosophy of translation: one side considers the more literal form of translation to be accurate and faithful, while the other claims that the more idiomatic form of translation is accurate and faithful.¹

It is easy to be persuaded that “literal” is better. What lies behind the notion that an idiomatic translation is better? The claim which the dynamic equivalence side makes, that the idiomatic translation is better than a literal one, deserves attention. We need to have a better understanding of the dynamic equivalence translations in general to formulate a fair assessment of it. This is the objective in the first part of this paper: to explain the dynamic equivalence theory. The second section seeks to find out how this theory relates to the history of the theory of translation. But the focus of this paper is on the NIV since it is the translation which is reputed to adhere to the dynamic equivalence theory; therefore, whatever positive or negative opinions one may have about this theory will be tested by examining passages of Scripture which are the special subject of the dynamic equivalence theory. Having done all this, we will be in a better position to decide which translation is more accurate: that which tends to be literal or that which tends to be idiomatic.

1.0 DESCRIBING THE DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE THEORY

The dynamic equivalence theory was developed largely through the writings of Eugene Nida. It builds on advances made in the field of linguistics (the science of languages). Nida did most of his graduate work in linguistics in the University of Michigan from which he received a Ph.D. in 1943. In the same year he joined the American Bible Society. In 1947 he published his first important work, entitled *Bible Translating* to work out the details of and to apply the principles found in *Guide for Translators, Revisers and Editors*, published by the American Bible Society. What began as practical reflection on some of the most important work which a missionary must perform (translating the

¹ It is not surprising that some should think the literal form to be more faithful. That some should say that literal is not accurate or faithful may seem rather novel to us. Consider, for instance the essay of Herbert M. Wolf, “When ‘Literal’ is not Accurate,” in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*, International Bible Society: Colorado, 127-136; or John Beekman, “‘Literalism’ A Hindrance to Understanding” in *The Bible Translator*, Vol. 17, No. 4, October 1966, 178-189.

scripture into native languages) was soon to become one of the most significant theories on translation in the later half of this century.

Already in *Bible Translating*, Nida had stated his distinctive ideas. He divided translations into three groups: *literal translations* (for example, an interlinear translation); *translation of ideas* (words are regarded merely as vehicles for ideas, symbols that have no inherent meaning beyond the actual object they symbolize; it asks, "What would the author have said if he had been using English instead of Greek or Hebrew?"); *translations based upon closest equivalences* (this is the middle ground where an equivalence is designed to avoid awkward literalness on the one hand and unjustified interpretations on the other.)²

An acceptable translation must be based upon closest equivalents. A literal translation actually distorts the facts of a language because no two languages correspond throughout in their words or grammatical usages. When translating, one will not find absolute equivalents. "The problem", says Nida, "in translating is not one of finding absolute equivalents, but of finding relatively close equivalents."³

The goal for a translation based upon closest equivalents is that the native bilingual person must recognize the translation as being the closest *natural* equivalent to the statement of the text. To meet this goal, there are three requirements: 1) the translation must represent the customary usage of the native language, 2) the translation must make sense, and 3) the translation must conform to the meaning of the original.⁴

Nida's concern for the way in which a translation reads in the receptor language became the focus for his studies. In the important work which he coauthored with Charles R. Taber, this new focus is contrasted with the older method of translation. In the older translations, the focus was on the form of the message - translators sought to reproduce stylistic specialties, e.g., rhythms, rhymes, plays on words, chiasmus, parallelism. The new focus has shifted from the form of the message to the response of the receptor - it must be comparable to the original receptors. A translation is correct not only if the average reader is likely to understand it correctly but rather whether "such a person is very unlikely to misunderstand it."⁵ This is especially the product of Nida's reflection on translation. He called for the translator to pay more

² Eugene A. Nida, *Bible Translating: An Analysis of Principles and Procedures, with Special Reference to Aboriginal Languages*, American Bible Society: New York, 1947, 11-12.

³ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵ *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, E.J. Brill: Leiden, 1969, 1-2.

attention to the people for whom he translated.⁶ He had already written in 1957, in an essay entitled “Principles of Translation as Exemplified by Bible Translating,” the following words: “Translating consists in producing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent to the message of the source language, first in meaning and secondly in style.”⁷ The requirement that the translation be a “natural equivalent” is paramount. The translation must not reveal its non-native source. When it is discovered that both meaning and style cannot be preserved in meeting this goal, “the meaning must have priority over the stylistic forms.”⁸

In *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Nida and Taber present their case more strongly. In stressing the point that meaning must have priority over the form of the text, the example of John 1:1b in the NEB is taken: “what God was, the Word was.” They write, “Here a radical departure from the form of the text is not only legitimate but highly desirable in order to avoid the prevalent error of reversing the order, I.E., ‘God was the Word’. The NEB has made the content unambiguously clear.”⁹ With this, a three-fold system of priorities is delineated: 1) contextual consistency must have priority over verbal consistency (or word-for-word concordance); 2) dynamic equivalence has priority over formal correspondence; 3) the aural form of language has priority over the written form.

An important contribution was made to the practical development of the dynamic equivalence theory in a book written by John Beekman and John Callow entitled, *Translating the Word of God*. Naturally, they also advocate that greater attention be paid to the receptor language. They are more generous on evaluating a “literal translation” than Nida and Taber. They classify four kinds of translation: highly literal, modified literal, idiomatic and unduly free. But Beekman elsewhere writes that there is a broader two-fold classification between those which tend to be idiomatic and those which tend to be literal.¹⁰ The distinction is well presented thus: a literal translation conforms more to the form of the original text, while an idiomatic translation corresponds

⁶ He writes, “Even the old question: Is this a correct translation? must be answered in terms of another question, namely: For whom?”, *ibid.*

⁷ This essay is printed in the collection of essays, *Language Structure and Translation*, selected by Anwar S. Dil, Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1975, 33; repeated on page 95.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Op. cit.*, 13.

¹⁰ “‘Literalism’ a Hindrance to Understanding,” *op. cit.*, 178.

more to the form of the receptor language. Neither the highly literal nor the unduly free translation is suited for general use. They clearly favour the idiomatic translation.¹¹

Driving to the heart of the matter, Beekman and Callow define what is a faithful translation: it is a translation which transfers the meaning and the dynamics of the original text. To *transfer the meaning* is to convey the same information to the receptor as to the original hearers without distortions. To *transfer the dynamics* is to make natural use of the linguistic structures of the receptor language, and to see to it that the recipient understands the message with ease.¹²

Nida makes a convincing point when he says, "The writers of the Biblical books expected to be understood."¹³ Similarly, Beekman and Callow say, "The Apostles and others.... preached to be understood and they wrote to be understood."¹⁴ And so they should be understood also in translation. Zeal for the form of the original text can easily cause the translation to be unclear to the point that the translator prevents the readers from understanding the message.

A detailed presentation of how this process of translation is to be made can be read at length in several manuals. But to put it briefly, Nida describes it thus: one must analyze the source language into its simplest and structurally clearest forms, transfer it at this level, and restructure it at the level in the receptor language which is most appropriate for the

¹¹ It is remarkable that they turn on its head the charge laid against the dynamic-equivalence school of thought when they write, "an idiomatic translation is conducive to the literal method of interpreting the meaning of Scripture; a literal translation, on the other hand, is not, and may even lead to an allegorical method of interpretation," in *Translating the Word of God*, op. cit., 20.

¹² Ibid., 33-34.

¹³ *The Theory and Practice*, op. cit., 7. Compare the humorous anecdote of Nida where it was debated whether to clarify the expression "the righteousness of God" in Rms 1:17, "many Bible translators have been loathe to restructure the Greek syntax so that it will communicate what the text actually means. In fact, one committee refused on the ground that if the laity could understand the Bible so readily, then what would the preachers have to do?", "Implications of Contemporary Linguistics" (1972), in *Language Structure and Translation*, op. cit., 265.

¹⁴ Support is sought found in 2 Cor 1:13, "For we write you nothing but what you can read and *understand*", and Luke 1:3,4, "It seemed good to me also,... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, that you may *know* the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed." Source: *Translating the Word of God*, op. cit., 39-40.

audience which he intends to reach.¹⁵ The technicalities of 1) analysing, 2) transferring the findings of this analysis, and 3) restructuring it in the receptor language, are intricate, however, let this general reference to this three-fold process suffice for this study.

The central concern of the dynamic equivalence theory of translation is to render the original text of the Bible into modern languages in a natural way. To arrive at this goal, new advances in the science of linguistics are applied to the process of translation.

We must take into account the valid advances in the science of linguistics when evaluating a translation. There are corresponding structures to all languages that need to be understood when transferring the smallest linguistic units of speech from one language to another. Even outspoken critics of the dynamic equivalence theory acknowledges this. Price writes about the dynamic equivalence theory, “This theory attempts to bring the science of structural linguistics to bear upon the task of translation, *a noble undertaking* if properly done.”¹⁶ Price acknowledges the linguistic findings of the dynamic equivalences school by stating that good translation requires a full understanding of the grammar of the sources language and of the receptor language. He adds, however, that a “transfer grammar” needs to be used to control the transformation of information.¹⁷

This central motive in the dynamic equivalence theory is certainly good for a translation should be understandable. The only reservation which one might have with the dynamic equivalence theory is that the receptor language might become more important than the original text. Zeal for fluency could have the ultimate effect of producing a less accurate translation because the translator might impose a fluency upon the translation when the original text was not necessarily fluent.

2.0 HOW THE DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE THEORY RELATES TO THE HISTORY OF THE THEORY OF TRANSLATION

A popular idea is that something which sounds antiquated and foreign carries more authority and dignity, therefore some people carry a prejudice against a Bible translation which reads like natural English.

¹⁵ “Science of Translation” (1969), 79-101, in *Language Structure and Translation*, op. cit., 79-80.

¹⁶ James D. Price, *Complete Equivalence in Bible Translation*, Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1987, 17. The emphasis has been added.

¹⁷ Ibid., 38-39.

But when we briefly scan the history of Bible translation theory, we discover that the central motivation of the dynamic equivalence theory (to render the Bible in natural language) carries more weight.

The first important Bible translator of the Christian church was Jerome. He produced the first Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate. He stated that he translated “sense for sense and not word for word”, and in support of this he pointed to the freedom which the biblical authors took in quoting the Hebrew OT or the Septuagint. He emphasised the importance of understanding the original text in order that he might transfer the meaning in translation: “I could translate only what I had understood before.”

Luther translated the whole Scripture with the Apocrypha between 1521 and 1534. Philip Schaff writes,

He adapted the words to the capacity of the Germans, often at the expense of accuracy. He cared more for the substance than the form. He turned the Hebrew shekel into a *Silberling*, the Greek drachma and Roman denarius into a German *Groschen*...

And a few paragraphs further, he says, “Luther’s version is an idiomatic reproduction of the Bible in the very spirit of the Bible. It brings out the whole wealth, force, and beauty of the Germanic language. It is the first German classic as King James’ version is the first English classic.”¹⁸ Glassman tells of how Luther defended his translation in Luke 1 by saying, “If the angel had spoken to Mary in German, he would have used the appropriate form of address; this, and not other word, is the best translation whatever the phrase in the original may be.”¹⁹

A contemporary of Luther’s, Etienne Dolet of France formulated the “fundamental principles of translation” thus:

- 1) The translator must understand perfectly the content and intention of the author whom he is translating.
- 2) The translator should have a perfect knowledge of the language from which he is translating and an equally excellent knowledge of the language into which he is translating.
- 3) The translator should avoid the tendency to translate word for word, for to do so is to destroy the meaning of the original and to ruin the beauty of the expression.

¹⁸ *History of the Christian Church*, volume VII, *Modern Christianity: The German Reformation*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1967, 359.

¹⁹ E.H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?*, InterVarsity Press: Illinois, 1981, 32.

4) The translator should employ the forms of speech in common usage.²⁰

William Tyndale is well known for his challenge uttered to travelling ecclesiastical leaders with whom he often argued: “If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou doest.” Tyndale probably had in mind to advance beyond the work of John Wycliffe who, because he had produced a very stiff, literal translation of the Bible, had very little influence on the actual text of the Bible in English. Tyndale later wrote, “I had perceived by experyence, how that it was impossible to stablysh the laye people in any truth, excepte the scripture was playnly layde before their eyes in their mother tonge, that they might se the processe, ordre and meaninge of the texte....”²¹

From the very beginning, it has been stressed that the translation should be clear, easy to read and understandable. For a time, there was a train of thought which opposed this notion, believing that the Bible was written in a holy language which must be reflected in a mysterious, exalted translation. This notion has today been properly discarded. Especially Adolf Deissmann has shown that the NT Greek was not a “holy language” but a very common one, even an earthy one.²² Therefore, the central concern of the dynamic equivalence theory should be accepted as proper and good. It is only the manner in which this goal is arrived at which may draw our criticism or perhaps our applause.

3.0 TESTING THE NIV IN SPECIFIC PASSAGES TARGETED BY THE DYNAMIC EQUIVALENCE THEORY

If we agree that the main concern of the dynamic equivalence school is correct, then it remains for us to test the application of the rules of this theory. In order to do this, the book of Beekman and Callow shall be examined in this paper. Beekman and Callow attempt to analyze the linguistic field into all the various semantic units which constitute language. In their discussion, they analyze the semantic unit in the

²⁰ This is paraphrased by Eugene A. Nida in *Toward a Science of Translating*, op. cit., 15-16.

²¹ M.T. Hills, *A Concise History of the English Bible*, American Bible Society: New York, 1962, revised by ABS 1983, 8-9.

²² See on this Eugene H. Glassman, *The Translation Debate: What Makes a Bible Translation Good?*, Intersarsity Press: Downers Grove, Illinois, 1981, 52-56.

original Biblical language and give dynamic equivalent pointers. In other words, they apply the rules of the dynamic theory in a very practical way.

By comparing Beekman and Callow's analysis and proposals to what we find in the NIV, and by comparing the NIV to the NASB and NKJV, we come to a deeper insight into how the dynamic equivalence theory operates in the NIV, and at the same time, we can examine how the NIV compares to the other two translations. This will give us a good basis to formulate an opinion as to the accuracy and faithfulness of the various translations.

3.1 The Language Specific Nature of Words.

i) *Words which describe a spacial relation* (eg. heaven is used for the One who lives there, i.e. God). For example, Mt 21:25 "John's baptism - where did it come from? was it *from heaven* or from men?" The NIV (like the NASB and NKJV) has resisted the temptation to translate "was it *from God* or from men?"

ii) *The attributive-whole relationship*. An example of this in the NIV is Lk 1:69 "He has raised up a *horn*^d of salvation for us"; footnote d: "Horn here symbolizes strength." The culture in which Zachariah lived had attributed to a horn, the idea of strength. The passage is literally translated and then explained in the footnote. The NASB and NKJV both have the literal translation without footnote.

iii) *A component may stand for the whole*. A possible example of this in the NIV is Mt 16:17 "for this was not revealed to you *by man*" (Greek: **saVrx kaiV ai|ma oujk ajpekavluyevn soi**, literally: "flesh and blood have not revealed this to you"). Here the NIV reflects one of two ideas of the dynamic-equivalence theory: either, the sense of a figurative expression has been translated directly, that is, it has translated the figurative expression "flesh and blood" into a plain English one, "man"; or, what is more probable, "flesh and blood" is taken as a component which stands for the whole (the components "flesh and blood" stands for the whole: a human being). Other instances where a component stands for the whole is "roof" for house Mt 8:8 (NIV has "roof", as do NASB and NKJV), "soul" for people Ac 2:41 (NIV does not translate the word: "about three thousand were added"; cf NASB and NKJV, "about three thousand souls"; NASB adds the footnote "I.e., persons"), "necks" for lives Rm 16:4 (NIV has "They risked their *lives* for me"; NASB and NKJV as well as the RSV have "their [own] necks").

iv) *The singular used for the plural.* In 1 Tm 2:15 we read, “But women^b will be saved through childbearing”; footnote b: Greek *she*. Here the NIV has chosen to replace a third person singular feminine pronoun with a plural noun in the text, while placing the literal Greek in the footnote. The NASB, however, has the same as the NIV, but without the footnote. This is a concession to the principle that “the third person singular is often used to refer to all those who fulfil some particular condition or to whom some qualifying statement applies” (cf. Jn 5:24, Rms 4:8, Jms 1:12, 1 Jn 2:4; in all these passages, the three translations render the Greek 3rd person singular into English 3rd person singular). Beekman and Callow recommend that “the translator needs to know whether the singular or the plural form is the more natural for this type of statement.”

v) *Euphemism.* Mt 1:25 “But he had no union with her...”; 1 Co 7:1 “It is good for a man not to marry.” In these instances the NIV renders Greek euphemisms in one instance with an English euphemism (**kaiV oujk ejgivnwsken aujthVn**, is rendered, “had no union with her”; cf NASB, “and kept her a virgin” which adds the footnote, “Lit., *was not knowing her*; NKJV, “and did not know her”) and in the other instance with a more frank expression (**a{ptesqai** is rendered, “to marry”, a translation which no lexicon gives; NASB and NKJV have “to touch”). The first instance gives recognition to the fact that in many languages, sex is referred to euphemistically.

vi) *Similes and metaphors.* These challenge the translator because words or expressions are used in a figurative sense. When a simile or metaphor is “language specific” in meaning, it may convey zero or wrong meaning in the receptor language if rendered literally. Being sensitive to this, the NIV translates the expression **toV pneu'ma mhV sbevnnute** “Do not put out the Spirit’s fire” (1 Th 5:19; cf NASB and NKJV “Do not quench the Spirit”). While the NIV retains the metaphor, they have changed the *topic* from “Spirit” to “Spirit’s fire.”

The metaphorical statement, “your hearts are hard” (and variant forms, as in Mt 19:8, Mk 6:52, 8:17, 10:5, Heb 3:8,15, 4:7) is usually retained in the NIV, but occasionally, the metaphor is washed out as in Mk 3:5 (“their stubborn hearts”, though not in NASB or NKJV) and in 16:14 (the NIV translates **thVn ajpistivan aujtw'n kaiV sklhrokardivan** thus: “their stubborn refusal to believe”; cf NASB, “their unbelief and hardness of heart”; NKJV is similar to NASB)

vii) *Concordance*. Concordance in the source language may not be real concordance at all, and therefore should not be reflected with concordance in the receptor language. A judgement needs to be made between real and pseudo-concordance. Beekman and Callow give as example of pseudo-concordance the way in which **glw'ssa** is used in the NT. In Mk 7:33,35 this word refers to the organ of the tongue, “Jesus touched his tongue.” It also means “language” as in Ac 2:4,11. Here, however, the NIV renders, “and began to speak in other *tongues*”, and in the footnote we read, “^f4 Or *languages*; also in verse 11.” But in seven of the eight occurrences of **glw'ssa** in Revelation it is translated as “language(s)” (but not in NASB or NKJV). The exception is 16:10 refers again to the actual organ of the tongue: “Men gnawed their tongues.” Yet a third sense of **glw'ssa** is, “what is said, the content of one’s speech” as in 1 Pt 3:10 and 1 Jn 3:18. In these two passages, the NIV has rendered “pseudo-concordance” as though it were real concordance (respectively: “keep his tongue from evil” and “let us not love with words or tongue”).

Beekman and Callow note that “[t]here is a (divinely) designed concordance throughout Scripture, so that although a particular theme is not dealt with at length in a particular passage, it is developed in the Scriptures as a whole.” This notion is applied also to OT quotations in the NT, but exceptions are noted as well. In a footnote, reference is made to Isa 7:14 quoted in Mt 1:23. The Hebrew word $\text{h}m^*l=u^{\wedge}$ has two senses, “young woman” and “virgin.” The context of Isaiah indicates the former sense while Matthew clearly chooses for the later. The NIV, however, has rendered pseudo-concordance with real concordance, translating both with “virgin” (as NASB and NKJV also do).

viii) *Cultural viewpoints*. A clear example of a cultural viewpoint is the manner of eating dinner in Palestine: it was done while reclining. The verbs **ajnavkeimai**, **ajnaklinw`** and **katavkeimai** are rooted in this culture and explicitly depict laying down or reclining for a meal. Where these verbs are used, the KJV translates “to sit” (except in Jn 13:23 where it has “leaning”). Beekman and Callow observe, “in all probability, the KJV translators saw a cultural problem here, since reclining is not the position in the English speaking world for eating.” The NKJV follows KJV. The NASB avoids the translation “to sit” (Lk 9:14 “Have them recline to eat”, Mt 26:7 “as he reclined at the table”) but the NIV does both (Lk 9:14 “Have them sit down”, but Mt 26:7 “as he was reclining at the table”). However, the NIV usually gets around the cultural problem by simply translating it “to eat”, in Mk 16:14 and Lk 7:37, or “one who is at the table” (compare NASB- “one who reclines at the table”) in Lk

22:27. Beekman and Callow point out that the KJV (and therefore also the NKJV) misrepresent the historical facts of the text.

ix) *Collocational clashes*. A collocational clash is a statement which may be grammatically correct but is nonsensical because it contains conflicting lexical components. For instance the NASB and NKJV contain a collocational clash in Mk 14:31 which contains the expression, “deny you”- but “a person cannot be denied, as such, but only some statement by or about the person.” The NIV therefore has “disown you.” However, the NIV does not consistently avoid such ‘collocational clashes’ (cf. Lu 9:23, 2 Pt 2:1, 1 Jn 2:22,23, Ju 4, Rev 3:8).

x) *Doublets*. Beekman and Callow advise that in general the meanings should be preserved, and the form may only be preserved when it can be naturally reproduced in the receptor language. Most doublets are either classified as synonymous, as “rejoiced with ... joy” (Mt 2:10 -- NASB “they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy”; NIV “they were overjoyed”; NKJV “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy”), “strangers and sojourners” (Eph 2:19), “spots and blemishes” (2 Pt 2:13), or they stand in a generic-specific relationship, as “answering said” (“answering” is specific, “said” is generic- eg. Mt 3:15), “he was in need, and was hungry” (“need” is generic, “hungry” is specific- eg. Mk 2:25) -- NASB “he was in need and became hungry”; NIV “were hungry and in need”; NKJV “he was in need and hungry.” The NIV has taken an unfamiliar couplet and made it familiar in the receptor language by reversing the verbs. This is precisely what Beekman and Callow advise: if the couplet form is to be retained, render it in a form naturally used in the receptor language.

This matter of doublets deserves attention since the Scriptures contains legions of them, and the translation of them fosters some debate. For instance, in the OT the expression $rm^aY\{w\sim.../u^Y\sim w\sim$ (or some variation thereof) occurs countless times and is almost always rendered in the standard couplet “answered and said” in the NASB and NKJV while the NIV renders it in a wide variety of ways. Here are the results of an examination of a selection of passages in all three translations: the NASB has “answered and said” in the following passage: Ge 18:27; 23:5,10,14; 24:50; 27:37,39; 31:14,31,43; 34:14; 40:18; Dt 21:7; 26:5; 27:14,15; but in 25:9 it has “and she shall declare” (remarkable in that the couplet form has been dropped) and in SS 2:10 it has a slight variation: “responded and said.” The NKJV has the same as the NASB in all instances except in Dt 25:9 where it has the standard “and answer and say”; there was a slight variations in 27:14 “shall speak and say” and in SS 2:10 “spoke and

said.” The NIV, however, on only one occasion retained the couplet form, in SS 2:10 (as NKJV). It renders the expression with a variety of single verbs: declare (Dt 21:7; 26:5), recite (27:14), say (27:15, Gen 40:18), spoke up (Gen 18:27); however, the usual verbs were: answer, reply.

The NT couplet **ajpekrivqh kaiV ei^pen / levgei** (literally, “he answered and he said”) occurs more than 100 times. An examination of a selection of passages yields the similar results as with the OT. The NASB and NKJV had no variation whatsoever. The NIV rendered the expression only once with a couplet: spoke up and said (Lk 1:60). Some of the less common renderings were: said (Mt 11:25;12:38), asked (Lk 5:22). Again, most common was either “replied” or “answered.”

xi) *Litotes*. There are about eight examples of litotes in the NT (Oxford English Dictionary defines litotes as an understatement intended to have the effect of emphasis). They may seem odd in translation, and thus the translator is tempted to change the double negative to a simple positive. All three translations retain the litotes in Mk 9:41, Lk 1:37, Jn 6:37, Ac 20:12;21:39, Rm 1:16;4:19, Gal 4:12 but the NASB and NIV make Ac 20:12 into a simple positive, “and were greatly comforted” (the double negative is quite cumbersome, cf. NKJV “and they were not a little comforted”).

3.2 The Language Specific Nature of Grammatical Structure

Grammatical structure includes hendiadys, semitic passive, irony, tense and abstract nouns. Beekman and Callow warn against simply matching the original structure to a corresponding receptor language structure.

i) *Hendiadys*. What is a good communication through hendiadys in Greek may be a poor one in English and therefore the grammatical form must be removed to enhance the communication of the original writer. Here are some specific examples:

Mt 4:16 **ejn cwvra/ kaiV skia'/ qanavtou** is rendered by NASB and NKJV, “in the land / region and shadow of death”; the initial impression given to the English reader is that “land and shadow” are two places; the NIV adjusts the form to “in the land of the shadow of death.”

Mk 6:26 **diaV touV" o{rkou" kaiV touV" ajnakeimevnou"** is rendered similarly in all three translations, “because of his oath

and his dinner guests” (NIV). The Greek is indeed a hendiadys, that is, Herod was not under a double obligation to his oath AND his dinner guests. Herod was bound to one thing stated in a hendiadys: “because of the oath taken before his guests” [thus Blass-Debrunner-Funk, *Greek Grammar of the New Testament* 422(16) hereafter referred to as *BDF*]. Here is an example where the form of the text should be altered to preserve its meaning.

- Lu 2:47 **ejpiV th' sunevei kaiV tai" ajpokrivesin aijtou'**. is rendered similarly in all three translations, “at his understanding and his answers.” It is not true that people were amazed at his understanding on the one hand and his answers on the other, but at his understanding evinced by his answers. Hence *BDF* and Bauer-Ardnt-Gingrich *Greek English Lexicon* (hereafter *BAG*) both suggest to sacrifice the form of hendiadys to render the meaning more faithfully: “his intelligent answers.”
- Ac 1:25 **th" diakoniva" tauvth" kaiV ajpostolh"**. NASB and NKJV maintain the hendiadys with “this ministry and apostleship.” Luke’s meaning is not that Judas’ successor should enter a two-fold office. The translators should have recognized the grammatical form in the Greek and *transformed* that form into the appropriate form in English as the NIV does: “this apostolic ministry.”
- Ac 14:17 **ejmpiplw'n trofh" kaiV eujfrosuvnh" taV" kardiva" uJmw'n.** NASB and NKJV have “satisfying / filling your hearts with food and gladness.” This is probably the best we can do in English translation, since the hendiadys is ambiguous. Does it mean: filling your hearts “with joy for food” (*BDF* 442.16; i.e., is the idea here that they might feed their hearts with joy instead of food) or “with joy concerning food” or something else entirely? The passage is ambiguous — is it an hendiadys as *BDF* suggest or does Paul have two distinct things in mind which the congregation should have their hearts filled with. The NIV has made it clear in their translation that this is not an hendiadys, “he provides you with plenty of food and fills your hearts with joy.”
- Ac 23:6 **ejlpivdo" kaiV ajnastavsew" nekrw'n.** NASB and NKJV retain the form of the Greek text with, “the hope and resurrection of the dead.” This is a poor translation since Paul was not on trial regarding the hope of the dead, but for his “hope-in-connection-with-the-resurrection” of the dead (i.e. this is a hendiadys). Again, the NIV gives a faithful translation by

recognizing the grammatical form and transferring it into the appropriate form in English with, “my hope in the resurrection of the dead.”

Several other examples of possible hendiadys which are not treated as hendiadys by any of the three translations are Lu 21:15 “a mouth and wisdom”, Rm 1:5 “grace and apostleship”, Col 2:8 “philosophy and vain deceit” and 2 Tm 1:10 “life and immortality.”

ii) *Abstract Nouns*. Abstract nouns are handled differently in Greek and Hebrew than in English. Beekman and Callow write, “Abstract nouns may cause the events or abstractions they symbolize to be either (1) objectivized, or (2) personified.” The second category ([2] personified) contain interesting examples but the levelling process which Beekman and Callow propose removes the vitality from the text and are not followed by any of the three translations (examples which they give are Lk 7:35, Rm 5:17,21, 6:9). However, here follow several noteworthy examples of objectivization of an abstraction:

Lk 1:12 **fovbo" ejpevpesen ejp j aujtovn**. NKJV objectivises the ab-straction with “fear fell upon him.” NASB has, “fear gripped him” and NIV renders it even more naturally by changing the active to a passive: “was gripped with fear.”

Jms 1:20 **ojrghV gaVr ajndroV" dikaiosuvnhn qeou' oujk ejrgavzetai**. NASB (NKJV is very similar) has “for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God.” The meaning is not clear because the implicit information associated with the abstract nouns **ojrghV** (wrath) and **dikaiosuvnhn** (righteousness) are not explicitly stated. NIV supplies the implicit information in the second half, but not in the first: “for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires.”

Jms 5:15 **kaiV hJ eujchV th"" pivstew" swvsei toVn kavmnonta** The NKJV has, “and the prayer of faith will save the sick.” The meaning of “prayer of faith” will be much clearer if a verb is supplied, as with the NASB, “and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick.” The NASB has also made the abstract word “the sick” more concrete. The NIV has done similar (but more naturally), “And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well.”

Other examples to which neither of the three translations have (properly in these cases) allowed abstract nouns to be objectivized are: Mt 5:10, 26:66, Ac 4:12, 1 Co 13:6.

iii) *Order*. Another grammatical structure to reckon with is order, either of words within a phrase, of phrases within a sentence, or of sentences within a paragraph.

iii. a.) *Order of sentences in a paragraph*. Questions arise in connection with Mk 6:17,18. This paragraph is not arranged chronologically. Beekman and Callow suggest that if the receptor language does not have adequate ways to indicate flashback, then the translator should establish temporal order to the sentences. Neither of the three translations do this. However, because Mark's narrative is not arranged chronologically, it is susceptible to misinterpretation. Here is a case where it appears to the 20th century reader that Mark is ambiguous, though to the original audience, it was not necessarily so.²³ Should the translator seek to make the translation more understandable? The NASB and NKJV do not attempt to do so for they render the text literally. The NIV, however makes the passage more understandable, although it does not make the extreme changes suggested by Beekman and Callow.²⁴ NIV has, "he had him bound and put in prison. He did this because of Herodias...." This is clearer than NASB (similar to NKJV), "Herod himself had sent and had John arrested and bound in prison on account of Herodias, the wife of his brother Philip, because he had married her." For us, this translation is ambiguous: is Philip John's brother or Herod's? Is Herodias John's wife or Herod's? Who married Herodias: Herod, John or Philip? NIV has rendered the text unambiguously as it probably was to the original audience.

iii. b.) *Order of Phrases within a Sentence*. Questions regarding order of phrases within a sentence are raised in Mk 7:17 **KaiV o{te eijsh'Iqen eij" oi'kon ajpoV tou' o{clou**. NIV and NASB have arranged the two phrases chronologically: "After he had left the crowd and entered the house"(NIV), but the NKJV has, "When he had entered a house away from the crowd." This is an improvement on RSV's, "And when he had entered the house, and left the people" - a translation which completely skewers chronological sense. While the NKJV is good, we should recognize that Mark's expression would be more easily understood in

²³ Mark's style appears awkward, but this may reflect Peter's style of speaking. What is awkward in written form is not necessarily awkward in spoken form. According to Papias, Irenaeus and Clement of Alexander, Mark simply "handed down to us in writing the things which were preached by Peter"(Irenaeus).

²⁴ It is possible that the NIV was motivated to offer this translation because of the policy to render long Greek sentences into shorter English ones, rather than rid the text of possible ambiguity.

Greek than in English (the prepositions have more force in Greek), therefore, the inversion by the NIV and NASB is equally good.

A similar situation is found in Rev 5:2, where an angel asks, **Tiv" a[xio" ajnoi'xai toV biblivon kaiV lu'sai taV" sfragi'da" aujtou'**; Chronologically, it would seem that the seals on the scroll must be broken before the scroll can be opened, however, NASB and NKJV retain the order of the Greek text. The NIV, on the other hand, seeks chronological sense with "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" Although this translation lends itself to a more correct exegesis of the passage, it precludes the exegesis of others who hold that the seven seals are imbedded inside the scroll and need to be broken as the scroll is being unrolled.²⁵

A sentence may be inverted not only chronologically, but also logically. A possible example of an unnatural logical order (unnatural to our western ear) is found in Mk 6:31. The NASB (similar to NKJV and RSV) retains Mark's order: "And He said to them, 'Come away by yourselves to a lonely place and rest a while.' (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.)" The reason for Jesus making this suggestion is given afterward. The NIV has brought a logical order (according our western standard) to the text: "Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'" Here the NIV seeks to arrive at a greater clarity for a Western audience than the original text seems to provide. While it may indeed be possible to arrive at greater clarity in translation than in the original text, it is not the task of the translator to seek it.

iv. *The Genitive Construction.* The genitive construction demands attention for two reasons: because it is used so often (in the NT it is used about two times in every three verses), and because it has a wide variety of uses.

iv. a.) *Genitives which communicate a relation rather than an event.* We have, for example in 1 Pt 5:4, "the crown of glory." All three translations properly resist the suggestion to render it, "a glorious crown" because this

²⁵ Robert H. Mounce alludes to this exegesis in his commentary, *The Book of Revelation* (NICNT), William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company: Grand Rapids, 1977, 143. He writes, "Opening the book is mentioned before loosening the seals not because the seals are placed at intervals within the scroll but because the content of the book is of first importance."

would deflect the focus from “glory” to “crown.” They all resist the levelling of such expressions as “full of hypocrisy” to “very hypocritical” (Mt 23:28) and similarly with “the riches of his kindness”(Rm 2:4) and “full of goodness”(15:14). However, in the genitive construction which indicates kinship, where there is an ellipsis, all three supply what is missing, eg. “Judas of James” is rendered, “Judas son of James” (the NKJV improves on the KJV’s “Judas *the brother* of James”). Two other examples are Mk 15:47 and Jn 19:25. Sometimes where the genitive indicates a relation between people, the word describing the relation is omitted, eg. **jEgwV mevn ejimi Pauvlou, jEgwV deV jApollw'**,... (1 Co 1:12). NASB is most literal: “I am of Paul’, and ‘I of Apollo’” NKJV has, “I am of Paul’, or ‘I am of Apollo’...” (adding the verb “to be” each time). The NIV supplies the “role term” thus: “I follow Paul’; another, ‘I follow Apollos’;....” The genitive construction is much more expressive in Greek than the NASB and NKJV render it, therefore, the NIV is a more accurate translation (cf. *BDF* 162, 266[3]). Compare **oiJ deV tou' Cristou'** (Gal 5:24) where the role term is supplied by NASB and NIV, “Now those who belong to Christ”, but not needed by NKJV, “And those who are Christ’s.”

The genitive can indicate location (A is located in B), as in Mt 2:1 **Bhqlevem th" jloudaiva"**, which NASB and NKJV poorly translate, “Bethlehem *of* Judea” but NIV, “*in* Judea.” While NKJV renders 21:11 “Nazareth of Galilee”, NASB changes to “Nazareth in Galilee.” Lk 1:39 however has “town in...Judah” (NIV) but “of Judah” (NASB and NKJV). Rendering such a genitive with “of” is grammatically possible in English but not natural; the NIV (similar to NASB and NKJV) opts for the less natural rendering in 3:1, “the Desert of Judea” instead of what Beekman and Callow suggest, “the wilderness which is in Judea.”

A final category in the relational-genitive construction is that which describes substance (A consists of B). For instance, Col 1:22 reads, **ejn tw'/ swvmati th" sarkov"**. Here **Swma** (body) consists of **sarx** (flesh). NASB has “in his fleshly body” and NKJV, “in the body of his flesh.” The NKJV has a very unusual expression which requires some thought to understand. The NASB, on the other hand, has understood the Greek construction, and seeks to render it appropriately in English, but has for some reason chosen the word “fleshly” (a term declared “obsolete” and “rare” in most of its uses by the Oxford English Dictionary). The NIV has carried the good start of NASB to a good rendering by “physical body.”

iv. b.) *Genitives which communicate an event rather than a relation.* The most basic in this category is the subjective genitive, or that which describes agency (B does A). The NIV generally contracts it (eg. “John’s baptism”) while the NASB and NKJV expand it (eg. “the baptism of John” Ac 1:22).

The genitive can describe experience: B happens to A. A peculiar form of this is in the expression “sons of” and “children of.” The NIV seems inconsistent for while “sons of the kingdom” (Mt 13:38) is found in all three translations (KJV “*children* of the kingdom”), the NIV changes “son of perdition” (Jn 17:12 NASB & NKJV) to “the one doomed to destruction”; similarly “sons of wrath” (Eph 2:3 NASB & NKJV; cf KJV “*children* of wrath”) becomes “objects of wrath”; and “sons of disobedience” (5:6 NASB & NKJV) is in NIV “those who are disobedient.” Evidently, the NIV does not wish to tamper with the expression “sons of the kingdom” presumably because it has to do with inheritance, but the other expressions can be altered since in those instances, the expression “the son(s) of”, have no inherent meaning and since it is not a familiar English expression, it is changed to something more familiar.

One form of the “objective genitive” is described by Beekman and Callow as the genitive which expresses regard (A is done with regard to B). An example is Mt 12:31, “blasphemy *against* the Spirit” (thus all three translations). It is interesting here that the NASB and NKJV do not simply translate “blasphemy of the Spirit” as they have treated the genitive construction in most instances. Similar, the expression **ejn th'/ proseuch'/ tou' qeou'** (Lu 6:12) is rendered “in prayer to God” by all. The very same thing is found in Rm 3:22, which is rendered by all, “faith *in* Jesus Christ.” There is an ongoing debate on the expression “the love of God” (occurring eleven times in NT). Here are the cases viewed by Beekman and Callow as subjective genitives (ie. God’s love for man):

Rm 5:5 - NASB (similar to NKJV), “the love of God has been poured out into our hearts”; NIV “God has poured out his love into our hearts.”

Rm 8:39, 2 Co 13:14, - “love of God” in all three translations.

I Jn 4:9 - NASB (similar to NKJV), “the love of God was manifested in us”; NIV “God showed his love among us.”

Jude 21 - NASB & NKJV “love of God”; NIV “Keep yourself in God’s love”

In the cases where there can be little question, the NIV has made the translation clear. This is commendable. The other six cases which Beekman and Callow consider to be objective genitives (man’s love for God) are:

Lk 11:42 - NIV (similar to NASB & NKJV) “you neglect justice and the love of God” (similar to Jn 5:42 and 1 Jn 3:17).

2 Thess 3:5 “God’s love and Christ’s perseverance” (NIV); “into the love of God and the patience of Christ”(NKJV similar to NASB). What Beekman and Callow regard as an objective genitive, NIV regards as subjective. NIV’s choice is undoubtedly right (similar in 1 Jn 2:5 “God’s love”).

1 Jn 5:3 “This is love for God”- here the NIV has made its only clear choice for the objective genitive; the NASB and NKJV translate as usual.

The NIV is quite ready, when the text is clear, to translate what is an objective genitive in Greek clearly into an objective genitive in English: 2 Thess 2:10 “they refuse to love the truth” (NIV and RSV). Again, the usual NASB and NKJV translation, “they do not receive the love of the truth”, is not immediately clear.

Beekman and Callow then describe the genitive construction expressing time, eg. Jude 6, “the judgment of the great day”(NASB & NKJV); “judgment on the great day”; similarly, NIV renders Rev 16:14, “battle on the great day” while NASB and NKJV have “of the great day.” Again, NIV shows better understanding of the Greek grammar by rendering it in an appropriate English form. The NIV has also taken the Greek word “days” in the sense of “time” in Rev 11:6, “during the time they are prophesying”; cf. NASB and NKJV, “in the days of their prophecy / prophesying.”

3.3 Conclusion on § 3.1 and § 3.2

In general, it must be observed that the NIV cannot simply be characterized as a “dynamic equivalence” translation. Many instances are cited (and innumerable more could have been cited as well) where the NIV does not have a dynamic equivalence where Beekman and Callow suggest them. The NIV proves to be careful in utilizing this theory.

There are instances where, in general, we might wish the NIV had been more careful. We can understand the rendering of “flesh and blood” by “man” (see 3.1.iii, Mt 16:17) but it seems to be an unnecessary impoverishment. Not everyone agrees that “put out the Spirit’s fire” accurately translates 1 Th 5:19 (see 3.1.vi). We are not comfortable with the rearrangement of the phrases within a sentence in Rev 5:2 or Mk 6:31 (3.2.iii.b).

In general, however, the translators of the NIV have interacted at a greater depth with the original text than the NASB and NKJV by

recognizing grammatical features in the Greek (and Hebrew, though Beekman and Callow did not lead this discussion into the OT Scripture) and *transferring those grammatical features into appropriate English ones*. It has fruitfully recognized the attributive-whole relationship in Lk 1:69, giving the literal form in the text and an explanation in the footnote (3.1.ii); it has recognized that a component may stand for a whole in Rm 16:4 (3.1.iii); that a singular can be used for the plural in 1 Tm 2:15 (3.1.iv - the NASB recognizes this here too, but it is not as loyal to the literal text as the NIV since only the NIV includes the literal text in a footnote); the NIV is more resistant to rendering pseudo-concordance as real concordance as with the Greek word **glw'ssa** translated only by "tongue" (by NASB and NKJV), even though it also means language (as translated by NIV) (3.1.vii); the NASB and NIV are distinct from the NKJV in being faithful to historical facts in describing the manner of eating dinner in Palestine (3.1.viii); the NIV handles doublets more naturally and is far superior in handling doublets of the "generic-specific" variety (3.1.x); the NASB and NIV handle a litotes very well in Ac 20:12 (3.1.xi); the hendiadys in particular is a form which the NIV renders into English in a superior way (3.2.i); the NIV rendering of the genitive construction is both accurate and clearer (3.2.iv.a-b).

It is interesting to note from this survey that on the scale between a more idiomatic and a more literal translation, the NASB stands between the NKJV and the NIV. On occasions, the NASB distinguishes itself above the NKJV in the way in which it transfers the grammatical forms of the original text into an appropriate form in the English. Three examples have been noted in the previous paragraph (see 3.1.iv,viii,ix). It may be added that the NASB also handles abstract nouns well, resists the objectivization of an abstraction as the NKJV does in Lk 1:12 and Jms 5:15 (see 3.2.ii).

But even the NKJV will interact naturally with the grammatical forms of the original, for instance it too accepts that an objective genitive can express regard as in Mt 12:31, Lu 6:12, Rm 3:22 (see 3.2.iv.b).

4.0 FINAL CONCLUSION

As God's people have done in the past, so today, they should strive for an idiomatic translation of Scripture. Having examined the NIV, it can be concluded that the NIV is more idiomatic than the NASB and NKJV, but at the same time, as accurate as the NASB and NKJV. When all factors are taken into consideration, it can be said that the NIV is more accurate since it more easily communicates the message as the original text did to the original hearers.

On some occasions, however, it is less accurate. The NIV has taken some of the positive gains from recent studies in linguistics and has applied them to the art of translation. The newness of these studies may explain some translation choices which we regard to be poor ones. The NIV will undergo periodic revision, apparently about once per generation. With co-operation such as we might offer, we can expect that future editions of the NIV will cull out some of these poor choices.

**NOTES ON
TRANSLATION POLICY
AND TECHNIQUE**

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- 4.0 CONCLUSIONS**

In weighing the merits of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV, it may be useful to reflect on what these translations themselves say about their translation policy and techniques and what their actual practice shows. The point is important enough for a translation must be faithful to the original.

After considering this matter, some of the possible implications of coming to a decision on which version to recommend will be considered.

1.0 OFFICIAL POLICIES

Let us first note the official policies and if necessary make a comment on them.

1.1 NASB

The NASB is not a new translation, but a revision of the American Standard Version (ASV). The NASB was made in order to rescue the ASV from “an inevitable demise” (*Preface*). Their policy is to render the grammar and terminology of the ASV in contemporary English. When it was felt that the word-for-word literalness of the ASV was unacceptable to the modern reader, a change was made in the direction of a more current English idiom. In the instances where this has been done, the more literal rendering has been indicated in the margin (*Preface*).

Of course, as the *Foreward* states, the NASB wants “to adhere as closely as possible to the original language of the Holy Scriptures”.

In *New American Standard Bible. Translation Facts*, a leaflet put out by the publisher, one reads that the NASB

is a *literal* translation which gives the biblical meaning in the framework of a word for word rendering. It is known as a more precise translation because of its faithfulness to the original manuscripts, even to such details as sentence structure, word order, and conjunctions.

One wonders here whether the desire for that type of literalness could not get into the road of good idiomatic English.

1.2 NIV

The NIV is a completely new translation and not a revision. The *Preface* to this translation gives quite some detail of the principles governing this translation.

It would be an accurate translation and one that would have clarity and literary quality ... The Committee also sought to preserve some measure of continuity with the long tradition of translating the Scriptures into English. ...

The first concern for the translators has been the accuracy of the translation and its fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers. They have weighed the significance of the lexical and grammatical details of the Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts. At the same time, they have striven for more than a word-for-word translation. Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words.

The *Preface* goes on to mention that English stylistic consultants were also involved to ensure that the language was clear and natural English. Later near the end of the *Preface* we read:

To achieve clarity the translators sometimes supplied words not in the original texts, but required by the context. If there was uncertainty about such material, it is enclosed in brackets. Also for the sake of clarity or style, nouns, including some proper nouns, are sometimes substituted for pronouns, and vice versa. And though the Hebrew writers often shifted back and forth between first, second and third personal pronouns without change of antecedent, this translation often makes them uniform, in accordance with English style and without the use of footnotes.

The last paragraph raises questions and we will need to watch carefully how it is executed. On the face of it, the *Preface* makes some valid points, but, especially the last matter of the different number of pronouns, should be treated very cautiously since there may be a reason for it. That there is also a Hebrew stylistic angle to this cannot, however, be denied.

1.3 NKJV

The NKJV is a revision of the KJV and not a new translation. Those who worked on this translation therefore saw themselves as continuing the labours of the earlier translators (*Preface*).

Where new translation has been necessary, ... the most complete representation of the original has been rendered by considering the history of usage and etymology of words in their contexts. This principle of complete equivalence seeks to preserve *all* of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form (*Preface*).

An example is given of how the interjection *behold* is always rendered in the NKJV in one manner or another.

2.0 THE PRACTICE

2.1 NASB

The literal character of the NASB is well known and its often extremely literal quality is probably the chief reason why this translation has not caught on.¹ Literalistic translations (such as, e.g., Job 36:33 and John 14:30b) are meaningless.

¹ See for a list of annoying literalisms and Semiticisms in J. P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV* (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 194-195.

What is less well known is that the NASB (as it itself implies in the *Preface*) is sometimes quite free or less than precise in translation. In some cases this can nevertheless accurately convey the meaning of the original, but in other cases it hinders understanding. For example:

Exod 29:33 Hebrew: “stranger ... not”. NASB: “layman ... not” (with note: Lit., *stranger*). This introduces the modern “layman/clergy” distinction which is misleading here, for the difference between the (holy) priests and others is in view. NIV: “no one else”. This is interpretative, but gets the point of separation that is in view across more neutrally. NKJV: “no stranger” is the most literal.

Num 15:30 Hebrew: “with raised hand”. NASB: “defiantly” and no note with the literal translation. This translation gets the meaning across, but is hardly literal. Similarly, NIV: “defiantly”; NKJV: “presumptuously”.

1 Sam 1:3 Hebrew: “that man”. NASB (and NIV, NKJV): “this man”. This is not literal, but meets English connotative and stylistic needs and in that sense accurately conveys the meaning of the original.

Isa 52:14 Hebrew: “at you [sing]”. NASB: “at you, my people” with no italics and no footnote. The text has its difficulties for the interpreter, but the NASB’s interpretative addition is unnecessary and may very well be wrong, since the pronoun probably refers to the servant.² NIV: “at him” (following two Heb. MSS and thus making clear that the servant is in view) and NKJV: “at you”.

Rev 21:16-17 Greek has “12,000 stadia” and “144 cubits”. NASB: “fifteen hundred miles” (with note: Lit., *twelve thousand stadia*, a stadion was about 600 feet) and “seventy-two yards” (with note: Lit., *one hundred forty-four cubits*). By converting the numbers to modern equivalents, the NASB destroys any symbolic meaning the numbers may have. NIV and NKJV give literal translations and the NIV gives a note with modern equivalents.

2.2 NIV

As a new translation, the NIV has tried to bring a fresh approach to many points of translation. The number of semiticisms appears to have gone down. For example, “stone him with stones” is now “stone him” (Deut 13:10), and sentences beginning with “And it

² See E. J. Young, *Isaiah*, III (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 336-337).

came to pass” are begun in number of different ways. “The liberty of glory” becomes “the glorious liberty” (Rom 8:21). One can hardly object to such improvements.³

As noted earlier, the NIV sometimes supplies nouns for pronouns to achieve clarity. For example, “his brothers” is supplied for “they” in Gen 37:28 to make clear who pulled Joseph out of the pit. Other nouns for pronouns are “Jethro” (Exod 18:6), “the Lord” (Exod 24:16), “the table” (Exod 25:26), “God” (Exod 3:12; Heb 8:11) and “the dragon” (Rev 13:1).⁴

The NIV sometimes expands the literal text to make clear what is meant. As Lewis notes:

Some tendency to explanatory expansion is seen. Hence, “unclean” becomes “ceremonially unclean” (Lev. 13:3; Deut. 12:15; I Sam. 20:26; Ezek. 22:10). Samson’s statement about the Philistines is paraphrased, “I have made donkeys of them” (Judg. 15:16). The *massebah* is a “sacred stone” (Exod. 34:13; Deut. 12:3; II Kings 23:14) and *asherim* are “Asherah poles” (Exod 34:13; Deut. 12:3; I Kings 16:33). “Peaceably” becomes “Yes, peacefully” (I Kings 2:13). The “shewbread” becomes “consecrated bread” (I Chron. 28:16; II Chron. 2:4; 29:18; Matt. 12:4; Mark 2:26; Luke 6:4; Heb. 9:2). “Look upon” becomes “look lustfully at” (Job 31:1). “Interest” becomes “excessive interest” (Ezek. 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12)⁵

According to Lewis, the NIV sometimes comes close to paraphrasing. “Amen, Amen” (Num. 5:22) becomes “So be it.” The American euphemism “sleep with” (Gen. 26:10; 35:22; 39:14; Exod. 22:16; Num. 5:19; 31:18, 35; II Sam. 11:14) or “come to bed with” (Gen. 39:10; II Sam. 13:11) usually (but not always; Gen. 34:7) replaces the Hebrew one - “lay with” - to describe the sex act. “Sleep with” (Gen. 19:8; 38:26), “lay with” (Gen. 4:1, 17, 25; I Sam. 1:19), “have sex with” (Gen. 19:5), or “had intimate relations with” (I Kings 1:4) replaces the euphemism “knew.” “Sleep with” is also used for “Go in unto” (Gen. 16:2, 4; 19:8, 38:16; II Sam. 3:7); and for “bow down upon” (Job 31:10). “I’m having my period” (Gen. 31:35) is used for “the manner of women is upon me.”⁶

Sometimes words are expanded to get the point across. Lewis notes that in 1 Cor 4:9, the Greek has twenty words, but the NIV has forty-four. In other cases, where the original is redundant, the NIV compresses. For example Gen 34:2 which in RSV is “he seized her and lay with her and humbled her” is compressed in the NIV to “he took her and violated her”.⁷

What to think of the above? As a matter of principle, we prefer literal renderings wherever possible. One has to be very careful

³ These examples and more can be found in Lewis, *The English Bible*, 317-318.

⁴ More examples can be found in Lewis, *The English Bible*, 320.

⁵ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 321.

⁶ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 321.

⁷ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 322. Other examples can be found in H. M. Wolf “When ‘literal’ is not Accurate” in Barker, ed., *The NIV*, 130-132.

not to add to Scripture. However, because of the conservative theological stance of the NIV translators, it is very difficult to find a rendering that is incorrect in the sense that it does not do justice to the meaning and intent of the original. This is an important factor. However, more needs to be said about this problem, but we will leave that for § 3.1

With respect to NIV's policy regarding sudden shifts in the Hebrew from one person to another, the following can be noted. In Gen 26:7, there is a sudden shift from the third to the first person, due to a transition to direct narration. This is accurately conveyed by the NIV. Elsewhere too, such a change is accurately conveyed in the NIV. For instance, in Jer 29:19 where there is an abrupt switch from third to the second person. Although the NIV maintains the Hebrew, it does add an interpretative addition by rendering the literal: "you did not listen" by "And you exiles have not listened either". This gets the point across clearly, but it is debatable whether the addition was essential for the clarity.

Most often, however, where sudden changes in person are encountered, the NIV seems to "level" it out and make them uniform. In Gen 49:4, there is a shift from the second to the third person, but NIV retains only the second person. As NASB renders the last part of Jacob's words to Reuben: "Then you defiled *it* - he went up to my couch". C. F. Keil noted in his commentary on this passage that "the injured father turns away with indignation, and passes to the third person as he repeats the words, 'my couch he has ascended'". The NASB and NKJV did not indicate this interpretation in the punctuation (it is as if this part is still addressed to Reuben). The NIV, following the interpretation of Keil, could have stayed with the Hebrew text here. However, in all fairness, there are two mitigating factors that the NIV can invoke. In the first place, there have been questions about the accuracy about this text from antiquity and there is an ancient translation tradition that the part in question should be a second person like the rest. Thus, the Septuagint (and Targum Onkelos and Targum Pseudo-Jonathan) have the second person, "you ascended". In the second place, the verb in question (הָלַץ) has been considered by some a variant of the second person form (הָלַץְּ).⁸ Thus there is some justification for the NIV's rendering.

In Deut 32:15 there is a sudden switch from the third to the second person (three consecutive verbs) which the NIV does not register. NASB:

"But Jeshurun grew fat and kicked -
You are grown fat, thick and sleek -

⁸ Cf. A. van Selms, *Genesis*, II (Prediking van het Oude Testament; Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1973), 274.

Then he forsook God who made him ... “.

In light of the Hebrew, NIV should not have changed the persons. Again, however, ancient translations like the Septuagint as well as Targum Onkelos have the third person and thus provides some justification for the NIV’s translation.

A similar phenomenon occurs elsewhere. The NIV changes persons of verbs that appear out of line within the context and in this practice follows ancient translations (such as Septuagint and Targums). Thus, e.g, also Isa 42:20 and 52:14 (where NIV indicates the change in a note and where the Septuagint, but not the Targum, chooses the second person rather than the third). However it can also happen, as in Job 16:7, that the ancient versions do not change the person, but the NIV does.

In conclusion, the NIV does not indiscriminately maintain uniformity of person. There are instances when it accurately reflects the sudden shifts in the Hebrew. While NIV’s practice of changing persons to maintain uniformity is not to be endorsed, there are ancient precedents, which could suggest that this is mostly a stylistic matter. In places where it could have consequences for the exegesis, the NIV seems to have the policy to note that in a footnote, as in Isa 52:14.

2.3 NKJV

The NKJV was not intended to be a new translation, but a revision of the KJV. Archaisms however still are sprinkled throughout the translation, suggesting that the revision was less than successful. This is a major shortcoming for a translation that wants to be understood today. As Lewis noted:

The reverence for the KJV limited the revisers and caused them to ignore in many cases the contribution of the papyri discoveries at the beginning of this century. The outcome is what Soderlund designated “a curious mixture of Elizabethan style with glosses of twentieth century vocabulary and grammar.”⁹ Peacock wrote that “the voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.”¹⁰ One still reads of “Hew down trees” (Jer. 6:6), “the wind was boisterous” (Matt. 14:30), “purge His threshing floor” (Matt. 3:12), “exceedingly great joy” (Matt. 2:10) ..., a hand “restored as whole” (Mark 3:5), “leaven” (Matt. 13:33), and “brethren” (Rom. 1:13). The change of “ships” to “sloops” (Isa. 2:16) and “company of horses” to “filly” (Song of Sol. 1:9) contributes little to clarity.

⁹ Sven K. Soderlund, review of *The New King James Bible: New Testament*, in *Crux* 16 (June 1980):31-32.

¹⁰ Heber F. Peacock, review of *The New King James Bible New Testament*, in *The Bible Translator* 31 (July 1980):338-39.

The NKJV policy has been to keep much that is perhaps still understood but is not the current manner of speech. An impressive list can be compiled: “day of his espousals” (Song of Sol. 3:11), “eventide” (Isa. 17:14; “eveningtide”), “high degree” or “low degree” for status (I Chron. 17:17; Ps. 62:9), “dandled” (Isa. 66:12), “carriages” (Isa. 46:1) for that which is carried, “befall” for happen (Gen. 42:4, 38; etc.), “befitting” (meaning “suitable”) for “meet” (Acts 26:20), “beget” for fathering (Gen. 17:20; etc.), but God is the one “who fathered you” (Deut. 32:18; “formed thee”). There is “fatling” (Isa. 11:6; etc.) and “fatted calf” (I Sam. 28:24 “fat calf”; Luke 15:23, 27, 30), “fatter in flesh” (Dan. 1:15), “feigned” for pretended (I Sam. 21:13), “frontlets” (Exod. 13:16; Deut. 6:8; 11:18), “manifold” (Neh. 9:19; Ps. 104:24; Amos 5:12; Eph. 3:10; I Pet. 4:10), “mansions” (John 14:2), “manslayer” (Num. 35:6; etc.), “mete out the waters by measure” (Job 28:25), “the matrix of My mother” (Isa. 49:1; “bowels of my mother”), “offscouring” (Lam. 3:45; I Cor. 4:13), “onward” (Exod. 40:36; Num. 15:23; “hence forward”; Isa. 18:2, 7), “outward” (Num. 35:4), “outgoings of the morning” (Ps. 65:8), “paramours” (Ezek. 23:20), and “pinions” (Job 39:13; Ezek. 17:3; “feathers”). ...

The NKJV includes vocabulary which many readers do not use and likely will not know: “offal” (Exod 29:14; Lev 4:11; 8:17; 16:27; Num 19:5). Some words, while technically correct, are less known than the KJV renderings. “Selvedge” (Exod 26:4; 36:11 ...) is one such example.¹¹

Similar criticisms have been made in our own circles by Rev. G. Van Dooren.¹²

The NKJV in its *Preface* specifically claims that it opposes dynamic equivalent renderings but only utilizes renderings which are actually equivalent. However this translation also contains paraphrastic renderings. For example:

Hosea 7:16 Hebrew: “they turn, not upward!”. NKJV: “they return, *but* not to the Most High”. The NIV has a similar rendering, but the NASB translates literally “They turn, *but* not upward”.

Amos 6:10 Hebrew: “hush! For not to memorialize in the name of Yahweh” which most literally can probably be rendered in understandable English, while retaining the ambiguity of the original, by “hush! For the name of LORD is not to be mentioned” (NASB). NKJV: “Hold your tongue! For we dare not mention the name of the LORD” (KJV is very similar!). NIV: “Hush! We must not mention the name of the LORD”. It is ironic that the NIV has actually less interpretation here than the NKJV.

¹¹ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 340-341.

¹² See G. Van Dooren, “Bible Translation One Hundred. An Evaluation of the New King James Version”, *Clarion*, 32:17 (August 26, 1983), 352-353.

Amos 7:16 Hebrew: “do not drivel (with words) [רַחֵם]” meaning “do not prophesy”. NKJV (unlike the KJV) changes the image and translates “do not spout”. NASB: “nor shall you preach [note: lit., *drip*]”. NIV: “stop preaching”.

Job 16:13 Hebrew: “my kidneys” (as inmost part of man). NKJV: “my heart [note: literally *kidney*]”. NASB: “my kidneys”. NIV: “my kidneys”. One can justify the choice of the NKJV but again it is ironic that a translation priding itself on complete equivalence is the only one not giving a literal translation on this passage. A similar problem with “kidneys” in Ps 7:9 is justifiably, but nevertheless paraphrastically translated “minds” by NKJV.

Since the NKJV italicizes words it supplies to make the translation flow better, it is relatively easy to see how often words are added. Does this not also make hollow the claim of only translating (word for word) what is there and striving for complete equivalence? Cf., e.g., Hebrews 9 and 10 and note the many italicized (and thus added words).

3.0 LITERAL, NON-LITERAL AND OTHER FACTORS

3.1 General Comments

It may be good to begin by rehearsing some points which Prof. B. Holwerda made when reviewing the new translation issued by the Dutch Bible Society about forty years ago.¹³ The first point he made is that a translation should be clear.¹⁴

In the second place, how literal should a translation be? The one who translates as literally as possible, runs the danger of a stiff and forced translation which reproduces Hebrew and Greek constructions. The one who translates freely can lose something of the flavour of the text. Should one always translate a particular word in the original by the same word in the new language? This is practically impossible. Holwerda sums up his feelings on these questions by noting that he has no objection with a somewhat free translation. A literal translation may be literal, but no translation, and we want a translation. Now the art of translating is to see to it that in a freer translation all the elements of the text are taken into account.¹⁵

¹³ Republished in B. Holwerda, *Populair-Wetenschappelijke bijdragen* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Cointre, 1962), 65-108.

¹⁴ Holwerda, *Populair-Wetenschappelijke bijdragen*, 67.

¹⁵ Holwerda, *Populair-Wetenschappelijke bijdragen*, 72-77.

In the third place, one has to reckon with the fact that the distance between the languages of Scripture and English is much larger than between modern languages in the same language group (like Indo-European).¹⁶ One can add here that if this factor is fully appreciated then it quickly becomes obvious that we may be posing a wrong dilemma by speaking of literal and non-literal translations. In too many cases it is simply impossible to get an accurate translation and remain literal. It could also be noted that the same danger of a wrong dilemma looms when speaking of paraphrastic or dynamic-equivalent translations as opposed to literal. One does not always have the luxury of such a choice. The first criterion of a faithful translation must remain whether it is clear (and thus faithful to the original).

In light of the above, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV should be judged on clarity and accuracy and not in the first place by how literal or non-literal a translation is. Considering the radical differences between the ancient and modern languages (in age, culture, and modes of expression), the concern for literal and non-literal can never be the overriding issue or criterion. Indeed, if one maintains that the task of translating is simply rendering ancient words into modern equivalents, then one is in danger of underestimating the depth and horror of the punishment and curse of the Tower of Babel dispersion. Not just words were changed, but also mindsets and ways of looking at things. The salient characteristics of the different language groups bring that out. Because different mind-sets are involved in different languages, the task of translating is exceedingly difficult and can never be reduced to the equation: if it is literal it is accurate. This approach does not work for languages in the same basic group like Indo-European (cf., e.g., Dutch: “De kous is af”, meaning “that’s the end of the matter”, although literally the English is “the stocking is finished”) and it certainly does not work with Hebrew (which is a Semitic language) nor does it work for ancient Greek.

The obvious proof of the foregoing can be seen in the fact that all translations we considered above are forced to translate paraphrastically at one point or another and exercise obvious interpretative judgment. Even the translations that want to be the most literal cannot circumvent this. Happily, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV all share conservative presuppositions and when decisions are made they are usually acceptable.

3.2 Evaluating the NIV Examples

¹⁶ Holwerda, *Populair-Wetenschappelijke bijdragen*, 79.

Since the NIV appears to be more free than the NASB and NKJV in trying to get the meaning across, let us now consider concretely how the above applies to the NIV examples mentioned by J.P. Lewis and listed in § 2.2.

i. In the NIV, the literal “unclean” becomes “ceremonially unclean” (Lev 13:3; Deut 12:15; I Sam 20:26; Ezek 22:10). Since “unclean” today can mean that one is simply dirty without religious connotations, the NIV’s addition “ceremonially” can be defended as making the point as clear as it must have been to the first hearers of these texts. After all, in ancient Israel the matter of clean and unclean pervaded all of life. As such the NIV rendering can be defended.

ii. Samson’s statement about the Philistines is paraphrased, “I have made donkeys of them” (Judg 15:16). The full passage is:

“With a donkey’s jawbone

I have made donkeys of them.

With the donkey’s jawbone

I have killed a thousand men”. (Judg 15:16)

The NIV footnotes the words in question thus: “Or *made a heap or two*: the Hebrew for *donkey* sounds like the Hebrew for *heap*”. Indeed, the singular of “donkey” and “heap” are identical. The Hebrew runs:

וַיִּאָמֶר שָׁמְשׁוֹן
בְּלֶחֶי הַחֲמֹר חֲמֹר חֲמֹרֹתָיִם
בְּלֶחֶי הַחֲמֹר הַבַּיְתִי אֶלֶף אִישׁ:

NASB and NKJV render more literally: “... With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps ...”, but the NASB senses that this is not enough to convey the original and so adds a note explaining: “Lit., *Heap, two heaps*; Heb. is same root as donkey”. The NKJV has no note and so the play on words is lost to the reader. Considering the matter, one must conclude that the NIV has conveyed the play on words across masterfully, even managing to make Samson’s song rhyme. There has been a price in terms of the other half of the meaning which the NIV placed in a note. NIV has supplied “I have made” which is assumed in the Hebrew (cf. the parallel “I have killed”). The approach of the NASB and NKJV has been to render the words literally and convey nothing of the flavour of the original in its nuances. The NASB compensated with a footnote. The NKJV did not even do that. One can see that this is not a matter of literal or not, but of trying to convey the original. Both approaches sacrifice something of the accuracy and try to make up for it in footnotes. It is difficult to say whether NASB or NIV is to be preferred here. NKJV is least preferable because the play on words is completely lost there, as there is no explanatory note.

iii. The NIV renders *massebhah* as a “sacred stone” (Exod 34:13; Deut 12:3; 2 Kgs 23:14) and *asherim* as “Asherah poles” (Exod 34:13; Deut 12:3; I Kgs 16:33). With “Asherah poles” the NIV adds (at Exod 34:13) the explanatory note: “That is symbols of the goddess

Asherah”. When comparing these translations with those of the NASB and NKJV it becomes clear that due to the difficulties involved, the NIV renderings are no more interpretative or less precise than those of the NASB and NKJV.¹⁷

The NASB and NKJV render *massebah* with “sacred pillars” (with “sacred” italicized only at 2 Kgs 23:14 in the NASB, but always in the NKJV).

The NASB renders *asherim* by “*Asherahs*” or “*Asherim*” (with note: “I.e., wooden symbols of a female deity”) and NKJV renders “their *wooden* images” (with no note) at Exod 34:13 and at Deut 12:3 the same but without the italics, and at 1 Kings 16:33 “wooden image” with note (“Hebrew *Asherah*, a Canaanite goddess”).

iv. Instead of the traditional (tables of) “the shewbread”, NIV renders “consecrated bread” (e.g., 1 Chron. 28:16 where NASB and NKJV render “showbread”). It should be noted though that none of these translations is literal. The Hebrew reads שְׁלֹחֵנוֹת הַמַּעֲרֶכֶת “tables of arrangement”, i.e. where the bread was arranged. The traditional translation is thus no more literal than the NIV.

In Exod 25:30, NIV renders “the bread of the Presence” (likewise NASB) while the NKJV has the traditional “showbread”. But it literally says לֶחֶם פְּנֵים “bread of the face” and thus NIV and NASB are closer to the original since “face” is used in Hebrew expressions for being “before” or “in front of” and in the context of the bread refers to it being in the face of God, i.e., before Him. Here we have another example of a traditional translation (NKJV) which is quite interpretative and a modern rendering (NIV) which is actually closer to the original. (The NASB is also closer to the original.)

v. In Job 31:1, NIV has “look lustfully at” a girl, whereas NASB has “gaze at” and NKJV “look upon”. Since the Hebrew in question is אֶתְבוֹנֵן, the idea is to give careful attention to. The NIV “lustfully”, although justifiable from the context, is not necessary however and should have been left out to retain the ambiguity of the original. Where a literal as possible translation is clear, there is no need to “improve” on the original.

vi. Lewis also noted (as recorded above in § 2.2) that “interest” becomes “excessive interest” (Ezek. 18:8, 13, 17; 22:12) in the NIV. The NASB and NKJV translate the term in question by “increase”. The point here is that תְּרִבִּית can mean either interest or an extra amount which is a type of surcharge. Thus the NIV translation is

¹⁷ Cf. also Holwerda (in his *Populair wetenschappelijke bijdragen*, 77-78) who in a related example recognized the necessity of some interpretative element in the translation.

accurate and for good measure the NIV includes a note with the alternate meaning (viz. “or *take interest*”). The NIV translation is also more understandable than NASB and NKJV given today’s use of English.

vii. How should we regard the NIV rendition “So be it” instead of the traditional “Amen” (as NASB) in Num 5:22? Lewis speaks here of coming close to paraphrasing (cf. above § 2.2). Lewis’ position is hardly defensible. “Amen” is a transliteration of the Hebrew which means “surely” or “so be it”. Those not raised on the Heidelberg Catechism Q.A. 129 may indeed not know the meaning of this term and a translation of it is in order. The NKJV, reckoning the difficulty in this passage, tries to have it both ways by translating “Amen, so be it”.

viii. With regard to sexual relations, the NIV has rendered the literal “know” with the euphemisms “lay with” (Gen 4:1, 17, 25) and “sleep with” (Gen 19:8; 38:26). These renderings appear to be an unnecessary loss, since the meaning of the original “know” is clear from the context and “lay with” tends to reduce sexual relations to simply the physical act. “Know” could suggest (depending on the context) that it is more than that. Better is NIV’s “have intimate relations with” for “know” in 1 Kgs 1:4. Perhaps the more forceful “have sex with” (for “know”) is justified in Gen 19:5 given the context. When the simple physical act is in view, Hebrew is able to use “to go into” (Gen 16:2, 4 of Abraham and Hagar; NIV “sleep with”) and “lay with” (Gen 26:10; NIV “sleep with”; Gen 39:10; NIV “go to bed with”).

Perhaps we are too sensitive to the loss of “know” in sexual contexts for clearly a translation that prides itself in being literal essentially treats it as a Hebraism which should be discarded for the sake of English clarity. NASB translates “know” by “have relations with” (Gen 4:1, 17, 25; 19:5, 8; 38:26) and “cohabit with” (1 Kgs 1:4). All these places are rendered “know” by the NKJV except for Gen 19:5 (“know *carnally*”).

ix. One can question whether the NIV needed to translate “I’m having my period” (Gen 31:35) for the more traditional “the manner of women is upon (with) me” (as NASB and NKJV). However, in the Hebrew expression דָּרַךְ נָשִׁים (literally “the way of women”) we have an example of the wide use of a term like דָּרַךְ and a woman’s period may be precisely what is in view and thus the most accurate translation.

x. In Gen 34:2, it literally says “he took her and lay with her and humiliated her” (וַיִּקַּח אֶתְהָּ וַיִּשְׁכַּב אִתָּהּ וַיְעַנְּהָ). NIV: “he took her and violated her”. Does the NIV accurately convey the meaning of the text by combining “lay with her and humiliated her” in “violated her”? Two points come to mind. A literal translation is very much Hebrew in syntax. We do not communicate this way. In the second place, “lay

with her' and "humiliate her" both describe the same thing, namely her violation, because the first verb is "he took her", which according to the context, must mean "he took her by force". That being the case, his laying with her and his humiliating her are one and the same action. One could thus defend the NIV's rendering as accurate and good English. NASB also felt the difficulty (from an English syntax point of view) and translated "he took her and lay with her by force" (with note: Lit., *and humbled her*). There is no principial difference here between the NASB and NIV. The NKJV translates "he took her and lay with her, and violated her". This is a literal translation, but one can question whether it is English. We do not speak that way to get that point across.

xi. As noted above (§ 2.2) Lewis mentioned that in 1 Cor 4:9, the Greek has twenty words, but the NIV has forty-four. (NASB has 31 and NKJV has 32.) Apart from the dubious implication that a translation must be less than accurate if it uses more words, it is clear from the NASB and NKJV statistics that more English words are needed in this verse than the Greek required to express the initial thought? How accurate is the NIV?

The text reads: δοκῶ γάρ, ὁ θεὸς ἡμᾶς τοὺς ἀποστόλους ἐσχάτους ἀπέδειξεν ὡς ἐπιθανατίους, ὅτι θέατρον ἐγενήθημεν τῷ κόσμῳ καὶ ἀγγέλοις καὶ ἀνθρώποις.

Let us compare the translations, with major differences underlined.

NASB: "For, I think, God has exhibited us apostles last of all, as men condemned to death; because we have become a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men"

NKJV: "For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men."

NIV: "For it seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like men condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as to men."

If one compares the underlined passages, the differences are obvious. NIV explains the meaning of the Greek by supplying words not in the original so that the modern reader can know immediately what the flavour of the vocabulary is. How should one regard this? Prof. Holwerda in his comments on Bible translation recognized that a mere literal translation may not be good enough to accurately convey the meaning. For that reason, he wanted to see official notes attached to a Bible translation, as was done with the Dutch States General Bible (Staten Vertaling), although Holwerda did not want something quite that extensive. Holwerda continued: "But the principle that was behind it I recognize fully as correct. Simply a translation will never be able to avoid creating misrepresentations. We must insist that with the

translation of the Scriptures such a situation be avoided.”¹⁸ We cannot produce our own Bible translation (with its own notes) and even if we could it would be questionable whether that would be warranted.¹⁹ In any case, given the situation today, if a Bible translation wants to protect itself against misunderstanding where that is possible, it has little choice but to place some expansion in the text. Now in the case at hand, there is to our knowledge no argument about the correctness of the NIV’s expansion of the text. Indeed, a procession and arena are in view here and the Greek vocabulary indicates that. One cannot know that from the NASB and NKJV. Only those who know the Greek language well will know the connotations associated with the vocabulary used, connotations which the NIV brings out in its translation. The NIV translation is thus more accurate and prevents to some degree at least the creation of wrong impressions as to the meaning of the text. In light of this, it is better to speak of a fuller translation (as opposed to a bare bones literal rendering) rather than an expansion of the original. For technically no additional meaning is really added. The NIV is thus to be commended for this. Its great clarity is a great asset to the faithful transmission of this part of the Word.

In light of the above, the conclusion that has been drawn by a translator on the NIV’s approach may very well be right.

The NIV has been very cautious when it has departed from a “literal” rendering, but its willingness to be less literal has markedly enhanced its overall accuracy.²⁰

3.3 Ecclesiastical Reports

3.3.1 Report to Synod 1980

The Committee on Bible Translations submitted a report to Synod 1980 of the Canadian Reformed Churches. Leaving aside specific criticisms (for the report spoke more in terms of general impressions on the basis of their study without including all the specifics to the Synod), let us note the general summarizing evaluations.

¹⁸ A free translation of “Maar het principe, dat erachter zat, erken ik ten volle als juist. Een vertaling-zonder-meer zal bij de geschetste stand van zaken er nooit aan ontkomen, om verkeerde voorstellingen te wekken. En we dienen ernaar to staan, dat bij de Schrift dat voorkomen wordt.” Holwerda in his *Populair wetenschappelijke bijdragen*, 83.

¹⁹ See, e.g., “Een ‘vrijgemaakte’ bijbelvertaling is voor mij een schrikbeeld”, *Nederlands Dagblad*, 30 November 1991 [interview of Dr. J. Van Bruggen, conducted by R. Wiskerke].

²⁰ Wolf in Barker, ed., *The NIV*, 136. See further below under § 3.

This report noted with respect to the **NASB**: “The NASB, in spite of its closeness to the KJV in sticking to the letter of the accepted text, misses the appeal which the KJV once had because of the beauty of its language and style and clarity of expression.” In a later summary, it was noted that the NASB gives clear and correct translations, but also literalistic and obscure ones. In the final considerations of the majority report, it was noted that the NASB “is often too literal to be lucid and clear and it does not render itself suitable for liturgical use”. The minority considerations stated that all versions were suitable for church use.²¹

Concerning the **NIV**, this Report (1980) stated “It is generally felt that the NIV is the most appealing translation but not the most exact one”. In a later summary, it was noted that “the NIV has a beauty of its own because of its clarity and its freshness of expression. There is however another side to the coin, that, namely the translation is free or too free. ... The NIV ... tends too much to bring out the interpretation of a word or verse in the translation of it.” In the considerations of the majority report we read “Although the NIV uses clear and contemporary English, the so-called dynamic equivalent manner of translation makes the version too free for use in the pulpit.” In the minority considerations, we read about the NIV that “Linguistically it is clear and fresh. However, owing to its method and principles of translation, it tends to be too interpretative, and in this sense is not always as faithful to the original text as it should be”. It is also suitable for use in church.²²

Significantly, both the majority and minority recommendations of this report, recommended that if the RSV met with insurmountable objections that the churches should be free to use the NASB and NIV.²³ This recommendation shows that the objections against the NASB and NIV by those who studied these translations were not of such a nature that these translations could not have a place in the churches. The Synod decided to leave the use of the NASB in the freedom of the churches if the RSV met with insurmountable objections.²⁴

3.3.2 Australian Reports

²¹ See Report of this Committee in *Acts General Synod Smithville, Ontario 1980*, 230, 231, 234.

²² See Report of this Committee in *Acts General Synod Smithville, Ontario 1980*, 230, 232, 234.

²³ See Report of this Committee in *Acts General Synod Smithville, Ontario 1980*, 233, 234.

²⁴ *Acts General Synod Smithville, Ontario 1980*, Art. 111.

Official reports have been submitted to the Synods of our sister churches in Australia (Free Reformed Churches) in 1989, 1992, and 1994. It is good to take note of the results and the conclusions of their investigations. Within the context of this paper, no evaluation will be attempted.

3.3.2.1 NASB

The Report submitted in 1989 agrees with the 1980 Report submitted to the Canadian Reformed Churches that the NASB “is often too literal to be lucid and clear, and does not render itself suitable for liturgical use”. Although the NASB is not the best for family, church or school use, it is a reliable translation that provides valuable information. “Its aim of staying close to the Greek and Hebrew provides the attentive student ... with a wealth of information about original languages, and a useful check on other more idiomatic translations such as the RSV or the NIV. This is where its strength lies.”²⁵

The Report submitted in 1992 confirmed the findings of its predecessor. “We are agreed that on the basis of its linguistic and stylistic characteristics, the NASB cannot be recommended to replace the RSV for worship services, for instruction at home and at school, and for memorization, though its advantages for private and group Bible study ... make it a valuable study aid.”²⁶ The Report’s final recommendation included the following: “to omit the NASB from further consideration for use in the church services”.²⁷

3.3.2.2 NIV and NKJV

The 1989 Report did a comparative study on the RSV and NIV and concluded (among others) the following.

The NIV and RSV both are generally accurate in translation; both have strengths and faults.

The NIV has greater clarity and readability than the RSV.

The NIV adheres much more strongly to the unity between the two testaments than the RSV.

Thus, on the basis of the above points [which includes additional ones not mentioned here], the NIV is more suitable for worship, instruction, and memorisation.

... The conclusion is clear that the NIV is better than the RSV.²⁸

²⁵ *Report on Bible Translation* (1989), 17.

²⁶ *Report on Bible Translations* (1992), § 4.G.

²⁷ *Report on Bible Translations* (1992), § 8.

²⁸ *Report on Bible Translation* (1989), 28.

The 1992 Report concluded the following on the NIV.

- a. The NIV is a clear translation in contemporary English.
- b. The loss of reliability as a result of the method of translation makes Deputies reluctant to recommend the NIV for use in the church services.
- c. The NIV can be useful when used together with a more literal translation.²⁹

After comparing the NKJV and NIV in a number of passages, the 1992 Report concludes (among others) that

1. There is no such thing as a perfect or near perfect translation. Both translations have their pros and cons.
2. The strength of the NIV is the weakness of the NKJV and vice-versa. This would make it ideal to use both translations side by side.
3. We will have to weigh the pros and cons and judge what is worse: losses through simplification or losses through unclarity.

The 1994 Report compared the NIV and NKJV and concluded (among others) the following.

1. The NIV is valuable as a clear translation in contemporary English. Its drawback is that it is too free and too interpretative at times.
2. The NKJV is valuable as a more literal translation. ... Its major drawback is its lack of clarity.
3. All things being equal, the loss through simplification or paraphrastic interpretation is more serious than the loss through lack of clarity. Generally, in the case of lack of clarity, the original words in the text can still be traced back.
4. It appears that the losses in the NKJV due to lack of clarity are more frequent than the losses in the NIV due to simplification or paraphrastic interpretation. This implies that the NIV is not necessarily less reliable than the NKJV. In fact in many instances the NIV is more reliable than the NKJV.
5. Because of the importance of having a clear translation in contemporary English - the NKJV is weak in this regard -, the NIV remains a translation worthy of serious consideration for use in the churches, homes and schools.³⁰

The 1989 Report concluded with respect to the **NKJV**:

Regarding reliability, we appreciate the fact that the NKJV has not followed the RSV in that translation's apparent surrender to liberal influences. However, the objections outlined above, particularly about the textual choices, the submission to dispensationalist thoughts, and the confusing policy to capitalise pronouns referring to the Godhead, negatively affect the reliability of this translation and constitute a formidable stumbling block to our acceptance of the NKJV as a viable alternative to the RSV.

We have no complaints about the maintenance of the unity of the Scriptures in the NKJV.

²⁹ *Report on Bible Translations* (1992), § 6.5.

³⁰ *Report to Synod 1994*, 19.

As to readability, the editions we have seen are attractively presented and at first inspection give the appearance of a translation which is cogent and convincing. After closer examination, however, we must record critical notes about the method of translation, the mixed word usage, and the stilted sentence structure which together make us conclude that it can hardly be called a modern translation.

Summing up, your deputies cannot recommend the NKJV for use in the church services.

The 1992 Report disputed the allegation of dispensationalist influence in the NKJV³¹ and drew the following conclusions with regard to the NKJV.

1. The NKJV is faithful to the form of the original.
2. This faithfulness to the form has resulted in some considerable losses in clarity in its language, though these losses are not as severe as in the NASB. Their extent merits further investigation.
3. The NKJV's underlying text is of significant value. The translation's fidelity gains to a major degree because it is a matter of safety to follow that long established form of the text. Therefore it is worthy of serious consideration by the Churches.
4. The extent to which the NKJV has made use of the textual scholarship of the last centuries needs further examination, especially as related to the NT.³²

3.4 Representative Reviews Elsewhere

The task of evaluating three translations is awesome and no single committee can do exhaustive work. It may therefore be useful to listen to the conclusions of others respecting the strengths and weaknesses of the translations we are considering. In giving as representative a sampling from different authors as is possible, we will be looking especially for recurring themes in the reviews so that we get an idea of what most critics are agreed on regarding these translations.

3.4.1 NASB

“The English language of this text is no better in 1962 than the ASV language was in 1902. It is certainly not ‘clear and contemporary’ English”. In a review on the NASB Gospel of John which goes on to note the peculiarities of the NASB rendering certain Greek tenses and grammatical constructions.³³

³¹ *Report of Bible Translations*, § 5.B.

³² The *Report on Bible Translations*, (1992), § 7.E. The last word “NT” is actually “OT” in the *Report*, but this must be an error as the OT was not discussed.

³³ R. G. Bratcher in *Bible Translator* 13 (1962) 234-236.

“NASB is so painfully literal in places as to read more like a ‘pony’ than a translation ... On matters of text NASB is scrupulously exact [for both OT and NT] ... The NASB language is not really contemporary, the English is not idiomatic, and one wonders whether the revisers have reached their goal of making this bible ‘understandable to the masses’”.³⁴

3.4.2 NIV

There are an enormous number of reviews on the NIV. The following is only a selection. The vast majority of the reviews are very positive.

“The directness and simplicity of the NIV can only be appreciated by reading it through. ... The translators hold closely to the inspired text: this is no rambling paraphrase. That said, they nevertheless rightly recognise that thought patterns, rules of grammar, and social customs differ from language to language, age to age, and culture to culture; and these differences necessarily affect the translation” [examples are given] ... The NIV is the best version in the English language, eminently suitable both for private and public use, as well as for memory work.”³⁵

“The NIV is indeed a middle-of the road Version. It stands somewhere between the RSV and the GNB [Good News Bible]” - avoiding the archaic, too literal diction of the former and the idiomatic freedom of the latter.” After discussing several issues, the reviewer concludes, “The NIV, then, seems to be conservative in style and diction, in textual criticism and in lexical decisions” and as he goes on to show, also theologically. Conclusion: “Perhaps the NIV is the ideal version to replace it [RSV] in many areas of Christian life. ... One hopes at least that it will have the universal acceptability which alas the RSV did not find.”³⁶

³⁴ R. G. Bratcher in a review on several new translations, including the complete NASB, entitled “Old Wine in New Bottles”, *Christianity Today* October 8, 1971, p. 17.

³⁵ D. A. Carson, in a review on the NT of the NIV in *Themelios* 24 (1975) 24-25.

³⁶ D. F. Payne in a review of the NIV in *The Evangelical Quarterly*, 51 (1979) 235-238.

“With respect to distinctiveness and novelty in translation, the NIV is appropriately conservative - that is, apart from the process of modernization there is not extensive change simply for the sake of change, which often results in the apparent loss of well-loved passages of Scripture. ... For the most part the conservative tendency is admirable, for it means that the reader (brought up, perhaps, on an older version such as the KJV) does not lose the sense of continuity and does not feel that this is a *different* Bible. But sometimes the conservative tendency is a little too strong.” Some examples are given (e.g. why not translate “Sea of Reeds” instead of Red Sea in Exod 13:18). “A check on some of the classical *crucis* in the Hebrew text indicates a further dimension of the conservative approach. For the most part the translators appear to have been cautious, following traditional interpretations of problem passages rather than adopting radically new ones.” The NIV renditions of Hebrew poetry are exceptionally well done and constantly portray sensitivity and insight with respect to the nature of the Hebrew. For those who are still bound to the KJV, the poetry alone should be sufficient reason to switch to the NIV.” His conclusion: “The OT NIV is a magnificent monument to Biblical scholarship.”³⁷

3.4.3 NKJV

The policy of the NKJV on the text used for the NT has come under repeated attack.

On the inclusion of the spurious text of 1 John 5:7-8: “The producers of the NKJV have every right to follow the traditional text if they so please. But do they have the right, in view of the massive amount of work done by textual scholars during the past 400 years, to keep the reader in the dark about significant textual problems?” The review notes that most changes from the KJV were for the good, but examples are given of English that is not contemporary and not easily understandable. The review concludes: “The KJV was truly a great achievement ... but it is well over 350 years old. It is not possible to make it into an adequate translation for our time without destroying its unique characteristics. So why not allow it to die an honorable death? It served its day well. Now let the newer versions (especially those that faithfully render the Greek and Hebrew texts with clarity) take over.”³⁸

³⁷ P. C. Craigie, in a review of the NIV in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (1978) 251-254.

³⁸ W. W. Wessel in a review on the NT portion of the NKJV in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 23 (1980), 347-348.

“There are two really shocking things about this translation: its initial capital letters for all pronouns referring to the Father, the Son, or the Holy Spirit; and its acceptance of the traditional Greek text underlying the 1611 translation”. The review goes on to demonstrate why these things are shocking. The capitalization policy leads to absurdities (as in John 10:31 where the unbelieving enemies of Jesus speak) and the text policy is incredible given the greater understanding of text issues. The conclusion: “This is not a modern translation”.³⁹

The updating of the language of the KJV has not been evenly applied. The reason is that “this translation enterprise is inspired by a degree of respect for the original translation of 1611 which effectively limits the range of revision possibilities. ... Rarely does the revision [NKJV] give evidence of a fresh grappling with the problems of interpretation and semantic transfer ... It is questionable whether dressing its [KJV] verbs and pronouns in twentieth century garb enhances either its beauty or clarity” in the NKJV. Regarding the NT text, “The textual base of the NKJV is ... open to question.” The conclusion: “As far as technical competence in the field of translation and revision is concerned, it does not represent a step forward.”⁴⁰

Concerning italics “We fear this device will be more distracting and misleading than helpful”. On the text policy (NT), especially on the inclusion of 1 John 5:7-8, “it is evident that ... there was more concern for tradition than truth”. Many improvements over the KJV are noted. Conclusion: “What is the value of this new version? ... The OT portion affords some pleasant surprises and does not have nearly the textual problems that the NT does. Even here, however, there are enough idiosyncracies, and the translators still bound enough to the old KJV, that it is difficult to give it more than a lukewarm endorsement. Coupled with the mostly negative assessment of the NT portion, we feel that this complete offering leaves much to be desired. It certainly can (and will) be used with much profit, but its self-imposed limitations make it suffer in comparison with some other recent versions”.⁴¹

³⁹ H. F. Peacock, in a review of the NT of the NKJV in *Bible Translator* 31 (1980) 338-339.

⁴⁰ S. K. Soderlund, in a review of the NT of the NKJV in *Crux*, 16 (1980) 31-32.

⁴¹ D. M. Howard and W. W. Wessel, in a review on the NKJV in *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, 26 (1983) 369-373.

In his extensive review in *Clarion*, Rev. G. Van Dooren mentions examples of awkward style, and difficult or obscure translations.⁴² After studying this translation, Rev. Van Dooren was not enthusiastic about it and was irritated by the nearly idolatrous veneration of the KJV.⁴³ His conclusion after also dealing with all types of other matters related to the NKJV is that “the NKJV is a faithful rendering in the sense that it shied away, far away, from any form of Bible criticism and other modern ideas.” However, he was not enthusiastic and could not understand that a NT text was chosen for the sake of tradition (the KJV). “Such a desire may be understandable, but scientific it is not.” His final conclusion is that we “do not need this NKJV”.⁴⁴

4. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the investigations of this paper and are largely supported by the studies of others as evidenced in the Reports and reviews noted in §§ 3.3 and 3.4.

i. Our findings on the NASB, NIV, and NKJV suggest that the NASB and NKJV are the most literal by design. These are also revisions and not translations and could thus be considered to have *de facto* a built in reluctance to change if that is not absolutely necessary. Both the NASB and NKJV have problems with clarity of meaning.

The NIV wants to be a new translation and it has striven for more than a word for word translation. The question which is raised is whether this translation is sometimes too interpretative and thus whether it is always as accurate given its less hesitant approach to expanding and compressing the text to get the meaning across. In our investigations we observed instances where the compression and expansion did justice to the text and got the meaning across quite accurately. Because our selection of passages which we examined was small, we would not want to say that the NIV is always able to convey the meaning accurately using these techniques. Much more time consuming study would be necessary. However, the selection we examined was telling in the sense that Lewis used this as a list of what he considered prime examples of expansion and paraphrasing.

ii. We must heed the comments of Holwerda noted in § 3.1 and beware of false dilemmas. The most literal translations are

⁴² G. Van Dooren in a review on the NKJV in *Clarion* 32 (1983), 352-353.

⁴³ *Clarion* 32 (1983) 318.

⁴⁴ *Clarion* 32 (1983) 371.

not necessarily the most accurate. Translation is more than matching words from one language with those of another. The key question must be whether the translation is accurate. The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all strove for Biblical accuracy, but the NASB and NKJV were hampered by too overriding a concern to remain literal (although they too could not maintain this “ideal” which they had set for themselves.) The NIV was considerably less hampered by such strictures and the general consensus seems to be that this translation is quite literal, but not slavishly so. In other words, when all the factors have been considered, the NIV can hardly be characterized as paraphrastic or excessively free.

iii. The NASB has been available for use in the churches since 1980 if churches had insurmountable objections with the RSV. There were churches which had difficulty with the RSV, but the NASB was never selected. This non-use of the NASB can have several reasons, but one cannot escape the impression that one reason is that the NASB was more difficult to understand when compared with the RSV. It is also telling that the Australian Report of 1992 recommended omitting the NASB from further consideration and that the last Report (1994) did not deal with this translation.

iv. The NKJV was never seriously considered by the Canadian Reformed Churches before Synod 1992 and its reception by church members who have become acquainted with it has generally not been enthusiastic (cf. also the review of Rev. Van Dooren mentioned above). The general Christian reaction to the NKJV has also not been overwhelming. It still remains to be seen whether this translation will have a meaningful future given its key weakness of being unable to translate/revise into idiomatic modern English consistently. Furthermore, there is now a new competitor for the King James market, *The 21st Century King James Version* (abbreviated KJ21)⁴⁵, another indication of the dissatisfaction with NKJV. There are also serious and legitimate questions about its NT text policy (seen esp., e.g., in 1 John 5:7-8).

v. No translation is perfect and that includes the NIV. There are problem areas of being too free, but when all the factors are taken into consideration, this is not near the problem that some would suggest. Translating is difficult work, especially if it be recognized that it is more than translating words. The criteria for a good translation cannot be reduced to the simple contrast of either literal or non-literal. (Cf. §§ 3.1 and 3.2 above). Both

⁴⁵ Available from KJ21 Bible Publishers, 40 North Coteau St., Gary, S.D. 57237 and advertised, e.g., in *Christianity Today* (e.g., August 15, 1994, p. 47).

the Canadian and Australian Reports submitted to past Synods have sensed and recognized this important point and have therefore recommended the NIV to the churches, in spite of objections or reservations they had.⁴⁶

vi. Considering the above, the next Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches should recommend the NIV to the churches. It has best executed its translation policy and best reached its goals. Indeed, it is simply the finest translation when all the criteria and the relative importance of the different factors are taken into consideration. Furthermore, this translation takes all of Scripture into account and is true to the Word of God.

The clarity and readability of the NIV may spark a renewed interest in personal Bible reading and study among young and old and stimulate anew the exploration of the treasures of God's Word. It is somehow difficult to imagine the English of the NASB and NKJV sparking that kind of response.

⁴⁶ The 1980 REPORT (Canadian Reformed) recommended that the KJV, NASB or the NIV be left in the freedom of the churches if the RSV was unacceptable.

WHICH TEXT-TYPE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK TEXT IS BEST?

Introduction

What follows here is a presentation of some basic facts from the history of the Greek text of the New Testament and its printed editions as well as its translations, including some results in the history of textual criticism. In particular two text-types are placed over against each other, one having its basis in the geographical area of Syria and Greece, the other in Egypt. Also two groups of scholars oppose each other. One group, by far the largest, strongly favors the Egyptian text-type, while viewing the Syrian type of text as late and inferior. The other group of scholars has the opposite view. In this debate we have to try to come to a balanced conclusion, as far as this is possible.

The Textus Receptus

Before 1881 the text of the Greek New Testament commonly published and used for translations was the so-called *Textus Receptus* ("received text").¹ This name goes back to 1633, when the brothers Elzevir in Leiden, The Netherlands, published their second edition of the Greek New Testament. In the preface they made the claim that this edition was "the commonly *received*, standard *text*." This text was based on the fourth edition of the Greek NT text that was published (1598) by Theodore Beza, the successor of Calvin in Geneva. In turn, Beza's edition was based very much on the text as published (1546-1551) by Stephanus in Paris and Geneva. This text of Stephanus was based on the third and fourth edition prepared by Erasmus (1527) who prepared the first Greek text of the New Testament that was printed and sold in 1516. With respect to this first edition Metzger states (p.102) that it "rests upon a half-dozen minuscule manuscripts of which the oldest dates from the tenth century." Presently some five thousand manuscripts with the entire Greek NT Text or with parts of it are known.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth century many of these manuscripts of the Greek text were found and many manuscripts containing a translated version, such as Old Latin manuscripts, Syriac and Coptic translations, and so on. The texts of these Greek manuscripts and of these translations was collated and compared with the *Textus Receptus*. It was discovered that many manuscripts showed different readings, such as a different word or word form. It appeared also to the scholars that certain groups of manuscripts could be distinguished which had almost the same text with only minor differences. The scholars then divided the manuscripts into three, and later into four, main families. These families are separated according to certain regions of origin.

There is first the *Syrian or Byzantine text-type*. The *Textus Receptus* is based on manuscripts in this family. The great majority of the manuscripts that survived belongs to

¹ The following data are taken from a book by Bruce M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., Oxford: Univ. Press, 1992, pp.95-146.

this type; their provenance is mainly in Syria and Greece or Byzantium. A few manuscripts of this family go back to the fifth and sixth century, but the great majority comes from the sixth to the fifteenth century. Compared with the other groups, most of these Byzantine texts are younger.

The second type comes mainly from Egypt, and is called the *Egyptian type*. The oldest manuscripts presently known belong to this group. Many are written on parchment and some hundred of these texts are on papyrus. They were found in Egyptian sand mainly since 1930 (Chester Beatty papyri) and 1955 (Bodmer Papyri). They originate from the second to the fifth century. To this group belong the oldest manuscripts on parchment, namely Codex Sinaiticus [Aleph] and Codex Vaticanus [B], from the fourth and the fifth century.

There is also a third type, called the *Western type*. To this family belong manuscript D (Codex Bezae) and the Old Latin versions. They come mainly from West North Africa and from Italy and Southern France (Gaul). Manuscripts of this type, especially in the Old Latin translation, go back to the third century.

A fourth type, called the *Caesarean type*. It is seen as a mixed type based on Egyptian and Western readings and going back to Origen (185-254) after he had moved from Egypt to Caesarea in Palestine, in 215. Even though the manuscripts were divided in these four main groups, the controversy is mainly about the significance of the Egyptian over against the Syrian text-type.

Continuing research with regard to these older manuscripts and the discovery of the different types of text brought quite a number of scholars to the conclusion that the Egyptian manuscripts, being the older ones, had preserved the text that was closest to the original. Among these scholars were Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort. They published a text of the Greek N.T. in 1881 that was based very much on the Egyptian type of text as this is found in the manuscripts Aleph (Codex Sinaiticus) and in particular B (Codex Vaticanus). This edition of Westcott & Hort, often indicated as the "WH" text, is not the exact Greek text printed in our days. However, the text published by the Bible Societies is a text closely related to the "WH" text and based very much on the Egyptian type of text, and especially on the codices Aleph and B. Thus one could say that since 1881 this (somewhat corrected) "WH" text based on the Egyptian text-type has, in fact, become the new "*textus receptus*" in the scholarly

world which views the old “TR” and the Byzantine text-type as inferior and negligible.

Grounds for the judgment of the inferiority of the Byzantine text-type and their refutation

Westcott & Hort had *three main arguments* for the inferiority of the Syrian or Byzantine type of text.² These three grounds are: 1) conflation, 2) the silence of the early church fathers, 3) internal evidence. Conflation is the combination of different readings from two or more text-types in a third text-type. Scholars argue that the Syrian text shows many cases of conflation in which the different readings of the Egyptian and the Western text-type are combined. An example is Luke 24:53. The Western text-type reads: “And they were continually in the temple *praising* God.” The Egyptian texts read: “And they were continually in the temple *blessing* God.” The Syrian text group has the combination of the two words and reads: “And they were continually in the temple *praising and blessing* God.” Westcott and Hort, followed by many, concluded that the Syrian text, by combining the two others, must be later than the two others and therefore inferior.

The second ground is that church fathers before the middle of the fourth century do not show Syrian text-type readings. Westcott and Hort concluded that, therefore, the Syrian text-type did not exist before 350 AD. With “internal evidence,” the third ground, Westcott & Hort meant that the Syrian text-type shows indications of being a revised text in which, for instance, differences between the Gospels are worked away through assimilation so that words of the Lord in Luke are identical to words of the Lord in the same story in Matthew and Mark. Or difficult readings are made easier.

Opposition against and *refutation* of this theory of Westcott and Hort has never been lacking, in particular in the camp of conservative scholars and churches. J.W. Burgon in 1881³ and W.N.

² The following data are taken from *The Byzantine Text-type & New Testament Textual Criticism*, by Harry A. Sturz, Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984.

³ *The Revision Revised*, London: John Murray, 1883.

Pickering in 1977/1980,⁴ who picked up the arguments from Burgon, are two examples. They argue strongly in favor of the priority of the Byzantine text-type, first of all on the argument of faith that God in His care for the text of His Word and for His church would preserve the original text throughout the centuries. It must be said that Burgon and his followers also tried to present factual evidence. Edward Miller⁵, for instance, provided a study in which he worked out data gathered by Burgon. He compared the number of occurrences of Syrian readings in the early church fathers with the number of readings from the Egyptian and Western types of text, and he states that the Syrian readings is larger than that of the Western and Egyptian type of texts.⁶ Especially in the second part of our century criticism regarding the theory of Westcott & Hort has come also from the more liberal camp. Some of these scholars follow an eclectic method. The eclectic method means that the scholar does not place a greater value on one text-type but places all the variant readings beside each other. Then he looks at how strongly each variant is represented in the manuscripts and in the text groups, and investigates which reading fits best in the context. On the basis of what he so finds he chooses the reading that he considers most likely to be the closest to the original.⁷

⁴ *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, Nashville: Nelson, 1st ed. in 1977, 2nd ed. in 1980.

⁵ *A Guide to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, republished, Collingwood: The Dean Burgon Society, 1979.

⁶ This information is taken from the book of Pickering, mentioned above, pp. 62-77. It is not possible to verify this, but Pickering quotes F.G. Kenyon, *Handbook to the Textual Criticism of the New Testament*, 2nd ed, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1951. Kenyon admits that, if the data of Burgon-Miller are correct, the Byzantine readings in the early church fathers outnumber the Egyptian and Western readings. However, according to Kenyon, many of these readings are not original but assimilations to the late Byzantine text-type. Pickering admits this for some but not for all cases; he sees in Kenyon's view the unwillingness to accept the Byzantine text-type as early (pp.68-72).

⁷ Examples are J.C. Hoskier, *Codex B and its Allies. A Study and an Indictment*, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1914; G. Zuntz, *The Text of the Epistles*, London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1953; E.C. Colwell, "The Origin of Texttypes of New Testament Manuscripts," in *Early Christian Origins*, Wikgren ed., Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961; G.D. Kilpatrick, "An Eclectic Study of the Text of Acts" in *Biblical and Patristic Studies*, J.Neville Birdsall & Robert W. Thompson eds., New York: Herder, 1963.

In his book Harry A. Sturz provides a good basis for such an eclectic method. He argues that the assumption that the Syrian or Byzantine text is late and inferior is based on insufficient and faulty grounds. He shows that *many typical Byzantine readings occur in one or more of the old papyri* found in Egypt, such as the Chester Beatty and the Bodmer papyri. The fact that these papyri come from the second to the fourth century proves, according to Sturz (and others), that one cannot maintain that the Byzantine text-type originates from the last half of the fourth century, but must have been in existence in the second century already, that is, simultaneously with the other text-types. Sturz argues further that, a number of times, the original text of a papyrus has a typically Byzantine reading which is 'corrected' into the typically Egyptian reading. This shows, says Sturz (p.63), that the Byzantine text-type is preceding the Egyptian type of text here. Referring to the study of E.C. Colwell,⁸ he mentions, among others, John 7:39,40, 8:54 in papyrus 66.

Referring to and quoting from the book of Zuntz (pp.142-177), Sturz discusses (pp.70-76) a list of 170 cases in which the Byzantine manuscripts align with the Western type manuscripts and with readings of the papyri. He concludes (p.74) with Zuntz that this proves that 1) "there has been independent preservation of such readings by each text-type from deep in the second century." Further, he writes that 2) "such agreements did not result from an Eastern [=Byzantine] adoption of readings which originated in the West" since the West would provide latinisms, not typically Greek readings. In the third place he argues that 3) "the West got these readings from the East originally ..., for the readings were in the East at the earliest period as is attested by early Egyptian papyrus-Byzantine-Western agreements." In other words, the Byzantine text-type preserves, together with the Western manuscripts and the Egyptian papyrus, an older text-type from which the later Egyptian manuscripts such as Aleph and B deviate.

Furthermore, the fact that the Byzantine text has *conflation* cannot be maintained as argument for its late date and, therefore, inferiority, writes Sturz (p.83-85), since the papyri agree with the Byzantine manuscripts in presenting the longer ("conflated") reading in a number of cases. He gives as examples John 10:19,31, where the

⁸ *Texttypes*, pp.130-131.

Egyptian manuscripts, including two papyri (45 & 75), read “again” while the Western manuscripts have “then,” and the Byzantine manuscripts have the combination of these two words: “... again, then, ...” For this “conflation” is preserved also in papyrus 66 which is older than the two other papyri (45 & 75) and the major Egyptian codices. Further, the Egyptian manuscripts show the same phenomenon of conflation in a number of cases, as Sturz shows (pp.85-89). Examples are *Mark 1:28* where the Byzantine texts have “at once,” while the Western text-type has “everywhere,” and Codex B has a combination of both which is corrected by Codex Aleph; *Luke 10:42* where the Byzantine text group reads only “one thing is needful” which is supported by two early papyri, while the Egyptian texts, for instance Codex B, read: “... few things are needful, or one thing.” A follower of the Westcott & Hort theory calls the short reading “a Byzantine reduction’ or later abridgement” instead of conflation; thus, he maintains that the change of the text is with the Byzantine text-type; *Col.1:12* where the Western type reads “(the Father) who has called you,” and where the Byzantine group, supported by the Caesarean manuscripts and even many later manuscripts from the Egyptian type, have “who has qualified you,” but the combination of the two readings is found in the Egyptian Codex B. Must we now conclude that this reading in B is conflation, and that, therefore, B is later than the Western and the Byzantine text-types and of an inferior quality? If the scholars who favor the Egyptian type of text refuse to come to this conclusion in this case, it is not justified, especially in the light of the papyri’s agreement in many cases with the Byzantine text group, that the conclusion of conflation and, thus, of inferiority must be made in the case of the Byzantine, that is, Majority text.

With regard to *the non-occurrence of the Byz. text-type in the early church fathers* before Chrysostom in the middle of the fourth century, Sturz argues (pp.77-81) that 18 cases from his first list of typically Byzantine readings, appearing also in the papyri, are found in second and early third century church fathers as well. He further argues that Westcott & Hort’s argument about Byzantine readings not appearing in early church fathers is 1) an argument from silence, and b) “an argument from the silence of Fathers in non-Syrian locales.” According to Sturz, we have no writings of early Syrian church fathers, but only from Western church fathers (as Clement, Tertullian, and Irenaeus), and Egyptian church fathers (as Origen), from whom we can

expect Western and Egyptian + Caesarean readings but not typically Syrian or Byzantine readings. In other words, the argument that the Syrian text-type is late and therefore inferior cannot hold its ground on the basis of the silence of Western and Egyptian church fathers. We have the factual situation here that typically Syrian readings do occur in early Egyptian papyri as well as in Egyptian and Western church fathers of the second and third century. This appears to indicate that the Syrian (Byzantine) text-type is old and at least goes back to the second century and not just to the time after 350 AD.

The cautious conclusion of Sturz is that about the end of the second century (appr. 180 AD) not only the Western and Egyptian, but also the Byzantine text-type was in existence. Therefore, the Byzantine or Syrian text-type, or the Majority Text, has to be given at least the same age and value as the other text-types in textual criticism.

The third argument of Westcott & Hort that the Byzantine type of text must be inferior is their judgment that this text shows revision which shows in assimilation and other things. The idea of revision is not maintained anymore today. And since the other two arguments cannot be maintained, this third argument, being rather subjective, does not need further attention. It is clear that that the Westcott & Hort theory cannot be upheld.

Nevertheless, this conclusion is not accepted by many scholars. We can mention here Bruce M. Metzger and Gordon D. Fee. The former⁹ asks the old Westcott & Hort question, "Why do patristic writers prior to Chrysostom and Asterius show no acquaintance with the Byzantine text?" without responding to the arguments of Sturz, mentioned above. This, in our opinion, makes Metzger's statement on this point more biased than strong. He goes on to write (p.292):

One must also ask whether the evidence of this or that Byzantine reading among the early papyri demonstrates the existence of the Byzantine text-type. A text-type involves a particular constellation of readings in a characteristic pattern, and the fact is that not one of the papyri collated by Sturz can be characterized as Byzantine in the text that it presents. One is led to conclude, therefore, that Sturz has failed to prove that the byzantine text-type is older than the fourth century.

⁹ *The Text of the New Testament*, 3rd ed., Oxford: 1992, p.292.

Gordon D. Fee reacts to Sturz's book with the same negative response. He argues:¹⁰

It must be emphasized that even though quite a few Byzantine readings existed earlier than this [350 AD], the text-type itself did not exist. The question here is not a matter of readings, but of *these readings all existing together in collocation in the same piece(s) of evidence*. The failure to recognize this crucial point is the Achilles' heel of Sturz's study as well. It does no good to argue that some Byzantine readings can be shown to have existed early. What must be shown is that they existed together in this form that early.

On this point of both Metzger and Fee, one can respond with the argument that here the same demand is made as with the old church fathers. Metzger and Fee will only be convinced if in the Egyptian region old manuscripts are found with completely the Byzantine text-type. However, it is not really fair to demand this. It is a very important argument that in the non-Syrian area, in this case the Egyptian region, and even in very early papyri, quite a number of typically Byzantine readings occur. When we combine this fact with that other fact that in the papyri a number of Byzantine readings are changed ("corrected") into Egyptian readings, we have the strong indication that these Byzantine readings are older and must be retained from very old manuscripts. It would be very strange that the (typically Syrian) readings, found in the early Egyptian manuscripts and thus in a different geographical area, could become the source for the later text-type in this non-Egyptian, Syrian-Byzantine region, rather than coming from an existing Syrian text-type as their source. That an existing Syrian text-type itself must be the source of these readings in Egyptian papyri rather than their result is more probable since many of these Syrian readings are also found in the early Western text-type. Therefore, the conclusion of Sturz must be maintained.

Over against the negative response to Sturz's book it is good to place the positive judgment of another text-critical scholar. In a review of the book E.C. Colwell writes:¹¹

Sturz's book is a worthy antidote to the views of WH on the Byzantine text. It is to be hoped that Sturz's message does not fall on

¹⁰ *Studies in the Theory and Method of New Testament Textual Criticism*, by Eldon J. Epp and Gordon D. Fee, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993, p.184, note 4.

¹¹ *Novum Testamentum*, vol.XXVIII,3 (July 1986), p.282-4.

deaf ears. The future of textual criticism will be the healthier if this thesis and the evidence given for it are taken into account by all those whose work involves the originality of the NT text and its textual history.

Conclusion

It appears that the careful conclusion of Sturz is valid, to say the least, and that we should accept the Byzantine text-type as anyway as old as the others and certainly not inferior to the others. Therefore, the Byzantine or Majority Text (rather than the *Textus Receptus* which is based on very few manuscripts) should not be rejected. Herewith we reject the bias of the majority of the critical scholars who favour the Egyptian manuscripts. This bias for the Egyptian manuscripts, in particular for the Egyptian Codices Aleph and B, appears to have no valid foundation in the picture of the history of the text. The bias in favour of the Majority Text is not worse than the bias in favour of the Egyptian text. This is how far we would go in our conclusion regarding the Greek text.

For this reason, if it is possible to accept the RSV or the NIV which follow very much the Egyptian text-type, it would also be possible to accept the NKJV if it had based itself on the Byzantine type of text. It is regrettable that the NKJV holds on to the *Textus Receptus*, instead of to the Majority Text. This makes a major difference, for instance, in the case of 1 John 5:7-8 and the book of Revelation.

This point that the NKJV follows the *Textus Receptus* has been discussed by the committees for Bible Translation and the Synods from 1989 - 1994 of the Australian sister churches as well.

**NASB, NIV, AND NKJV
IN THE LIGHT OF
PAST SUBMISSIONS ON THE RSV**

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1.0 PURPOSE

It may be useful to compare the NASB, NIV, and NKJV with detailed submissions made to past Synods concerning the RSV. Over the years the RSV has received an established place in our churches and it is always difficult to let go of something that has been with us for a while and go to something “new”. To help place the different translations in perspective, we will compare the NASB, NIV, and NKJV on points considered very important in evaluating the RSV during past synods that dealt with this matter.

2.0 THE DATA

We will be considering the reports submitted to the synods of 1974 and 1977 since these were the only reports that presented detailed study and recommendations on specific passages. All data will be dealt with according to the headings: General Considerations, Old Testament, and New Testament.

2.1 GENERAL ITEMS

2.1.1 1974 REPORT

2.1.1.1 General Recommendations

i. 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 submissions like these, 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 1974 REPORT also mentioned by way of example (in Enclosure I) that the disputed reading of 1 John 5:7-8 should be put in the text between brackets as well (as it is in Nestle’s *Novum*

Testamentum Graecum). It should be stated here that this reading is so obviously corrupt that the present Bible Committee would not use that as an example for inclusion in the text of a translation today, even if it is in brackets.¹

NASB: With two exceptions (see below), all the above mentioned passages have been included into the text of Scripture and indicated by brackets and footnotes that some or most of the oldest manuscripts do not have these passages. With Mark 16, an addition beyond 16:20 is even noted separately and in italics in the text. With Luke 22:19b-20 there is a footnote, but no brackets in the text.

Luke 24:51b is in a footnote only. That part of Luke 12:39 which was omitted and noted in the RSV (“would have watched”) is not in the text or footnote of the NASB.

The disputed reading of 1 John 5:7-8 is not noted either in the text or note.

NIV: Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11 have been included in the text of Scripture and indicated by brackets and accompanying notes in the text that some or most of the oldest manuscripts do not have these passages. Luke 22:43-44 has been included in the text with no brackets, but a footnote. Luke 22:19b-20; 24:51b is in the text but not footnoted and the contested part of Luke 12:39 is not in the text and not footnoted.

The disputed reading of 1 John 5:7-8 is not in the text, but is footnoted.

NKJV: Consistent with its unique text policy, the NKJV has included in the text and footnoted Mk 16:9-20; John 7:53-8:11; Luke 12:39 and Luke 24:43-44. Included in the text but not footnoted are Luke 22:19b-20 and 24:51b.

The disputed reading of 1 John 5:7-8 is included in the text and is footnoted.

Conclusion: There would not have been near the need for the concerns raised against the RSV with the NASB, NIV, and to a certain extent NKJV.

The inclusion by the NKJV of the spurious reading of 1 John 5:7-8 in the text without any obvious indication (like brackets) that this is a seriously flawed reading makes their text policy questionable. No average reader of Scripture will be able to discern from the footnote

¹ See, e.g., B.M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament* (2nd ed., Oxford: University Press, 1968), 101-102. Also note, e.g., that the next edition of the Greek text, viz. Nestle-Aland's *Novum Testamentum Graecum* does not include this in the text, but only in a footnote.

that this is a reading which no one seriously defends today. A member of the church defending the doctrine of the Trinity overagainst, for example, Jehovah's Witnesses using this passage will be very badly served. He will not be able to sustain an attack by this sect on this passage and it could leave our church member devastated. For that reason, this committee considers the somewhat idiosyncratic text policy of the NKJV a major obstacle to approving the NKJV for use in our churches.

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).

NASB, NIV and NKJV: The Holy Spirit is consistently referred to as a person in these translations. See, e.g., Romans 5:5, 8:11; Ephesians 1:14 and 1 John 3:24. In the last case, NIV does not use a pronoun and NASB uses "which" although identifying the Spirit with a capital as the third person of the trinity. A King James slip?

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV and NKJV are all great improvements over the RSV when dealing with the Holy Spirit.

The use of the impersonal relative for the Holy Spirit in NASB on 1 John 3:24 is understandable given their use of personal references to the Holy Spirit elsewhere.

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

NASB, NIV and NKJV: The paper "A Textual Comparison of Certain Passages in Hosea" (included with the present report) concluded that the NASB, NIV, and NKJV all are very faithful to the Hebrew text. This attitude stands in sharp contrast to the RSV which emended the text of Hosea thirty times.

Conclusion: NASB, NIV and NKJV all exhibit much greater respect for the Hebrew text in the translating process than is the case in the RSV.

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

NASB, NIV and NKJV: These translations all follow the established practice of translating יהוה by “LORD”. This practice is evident in the Septuagint and through it has become established in the New Testament church.

Conclusion: The RSV and the NASB, NIV, and NKJV all have a similar policy for translating יהוה 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.

To illustrate this problem and to see how the NASB, NIV, and NKJV approached it, the examples given in the 1974 REPORT will be noted and compared with the NASB, NIV, and NKJV. Rather than extensively discuss each case, the results of our study are given immediately below. They can be verified readily by checking the translations.

The RSV was faulted for creating an unnecessary tension between certain OT passages by the way they were rendered in the OT and then quoted or referred to in the NT. The passages for which the RSV was faulted were: Gen 12:3; 18:18 (Gal 3:8); Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14 (Acts 3:25; Gal 3:16); Deut 6:4 (Mk 12:29); 32:43 (Rom 15:10); Ps 45:6[7] (Heb 1:8); Ps 109:8 (Acts 1:20).

In general the NASB, NIV, and NKJV translate all these passages responsibly and in such a way that the unity of the Scriptures is more clear for the reader of the translation. There are however exceptions.

The NASB translated “descendants” and footnoted the most appropriate rendering (“seed”) in Gen 22:18; 26:4; 28:14. Since this translation is available in a footnote, the reader can still see the unity of Scripture. Also, Deut 6:4 could have matched the NT reference more completely.

The NIV improved on the NASB’s “descendants” by translating “offspring” and footnoting (“seed”) in Gen 22:17, 18; 26:4; 28:14 [no footnote], thus retaining the singular referred to in Gal 3:16 and making a precise match for Acts 3:25.

The NKJV has no exceptions and seems to have made a special effort to retain agreement between the OT and NT, although this does make for translations that can be somewhat forced and misleading (by using two different English words for one and the same Hebrew word in close proximity). For example, in Gen 22:17, נָרַע is translated “descendants” (without a footnote indicating the literal translation), but in the next verse (which is referred to in the NT) the same term is translated “seed” (which is the term used in Acts 3:25). A similar phenomenon is found in Gen 26:4; 28:14. There are no footnotes.

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV, and NKJV made special efforts to show the unity of Scripture in the manner in which OT passages (which are referred to in the NT) are rendered and by the way NT passages alluding to OT passages are translated. This approach shows a high view of the unity of Scripture.

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. (The concern was also expressed that the RSV had a weak Christology.)

A. With respect to addressing Christ with “you” rather than with “thou”, the RSV has been faulted in passages such as the following where those addressing Jesus knew He was divine. Matt 16:16 (Peter); Luke 4:3 (Satan); 8:28 (demons).

These examples are rendered in NASB and NKJV in such a way that the deity of Christ is recognized. The way it is done varies and that can be criticized.² NASB uses “Thou” in Matt 16:16 and “You” in Luke 4:3 and 8:28. NKJV uses “You” in all the places just mentioned. The NIV does not, as a matter of policy, have any distinguishing marks to differentiate addressing man or God.

Conclusion: Those translations which have the policy to distinguish address to God by special means, NASB and NKJV, recognize Christ’s deity more consistently than the RSV and are therefore an improvement over the RSV.

B. There was also concern for a weak Christology in the RSV 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 include Rom 9:5 (where “God” is separated from “Christ” by a period and so Christ is not identified as God) and Heb 2:11 (where the translation intimates that Christ has an origin [“of one origin”]. This would be in conflict with John 1:1,2).

The NASB, NIV and NKJV all render these passages accurately and show Christ’s deity. There is unanimity on the crucial part of Rom 9:5, but there are differences with respect to Heb 2:11.

The most literal is NKJV. (“For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified *are* all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren”).

² See the paper “Notes on Style” (§ 1.2.c) included with this report.

The NASB reads “For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one *Father*; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren”.

The NIV reads “Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers.”

The NKJV is to be preferred for leaving the exegesis up to the reader, but the the NASB and NIV can be defended.³ In any case, the objections lodged against the RSV would not apply to the NASB, NIV and NKJV.

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV and NKJV are stronger on the doctrine of Christ than the RSV in Rom 9:5 and Heb 2:11.

2.1.1.2 Some Conclusions of the 1974 REPORT

On the basis of especially points ii, iii, v, and vi above (under § 2.1.1.1), it was concluded that there is in the RSV “evidence of an unscriptural influence” and that “It is the opinion of the committee that we do not tie ourselves down to the RSV”.

In light of the above investigation, such conclusions cannot be drawn for the NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

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. Besides those mentioned in the 1974 REPORT, 1 Cor 2:12 is also noted.

NASB, NIV, and NKJV: Also in 1 Cor 2:12 the Holy Spirit is referred to as a person.

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV, and NKJV are an improvement over the RSV.

³ See, e.g., P. E. Hughes, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 101-106 and F. W. Grosheide, *De Brief aan de Hebreëen en de Brief van Jakobus* (KNT XII; Amsterdam: Bottenburg, 1927), 98-99.

ii. Indications of the influence of modern critical scholarship in the Old Testament. Examples given are Joshua 10:12 (where the sun and moon are addressed as “thou”, a pronoun reserved for God; thus implying that Joshua recognized the sun and moon as gods); Gen 11:1 (where the translation intimates a slow evolutionary development of language which at that time had limited vocabulary) and Ps 51:18[20] (where this Davidic Psalm is suggested to be post-exilic by the use of “rebuilding” the walls of Jerusalem, rather than “build”).

NASB, NIV, and NKJV translations do not meet with any of these objections.

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV, and NKJV are an improvement over the RSV.

iii. Indications of unnecessary contradictions. Examples given were Gen 9:20 (where the translation suggests that Noah was the first to till the soil, contradicting Gen 4:2 and 5:9) and passages which are translated in such a way that their being quoted or referred to in the NT is needlessly made difficult, such as Ps 45:6[7] (Heb 1:8) and Deut 6:4 (Mark 12:29).

The **NASB, NIV, and NKJV** translations do not give rise to these objections, although the NASB rendering of Deut 6:4 could have matched the NT reference more completely.

Conclusion: The NASB, NIV, and NKJV are an improvement over the RSV.

2.1.2.2 Some Conclusions of the 1977 Report

On the basis of the above points i, ii, and iii, it was stated that this committee feared that “the RSV shows evidence of unscriptural influence.” Although this did not mean that the churches could no longer use the RSV, the committee recommended “that the churches be left the freedom to use the RSV with discretion and care”.

On the basis of the above investigation, the conclusion concerning “evidence of unscriptural influence” cannot be made for the NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

2.2 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Changes to the RSV that were requested will simply be listed. (For more detail see the original reports.) Whether such requests would have been required of the NASB, NIV and NKJV will also simply be noted. However, if there is reason to note important differences between the NASB, NIV and NKJV, or to enter into a discussion, this will be done.

Changes to the RSV were usually requested firstly, for reasons of accuracy and faithfulness to the original, and secondly, for maintaining the unity of the Scriptures so that a translation of one passage does not lead to needless contradiction with another. Occasionally changes were requested in passages that were difficult but on which the Canadian Reformed Committee had a strong preference.

2.2.1 OLD TESTAMENT

2.2.1.1 1974 Report

i. Recommendations were made for changes in Gen 1:1; 9:20; 11:1; 24:67; 25:27.

These passages are translated in the NASB, NIV and NKJV in such a way that they would not have occasioned requests for change.

There is one exception, Gen 25:27. The question is a difficult one. How to translate *שָׁקֵט* in reference to Jacob? RSV has “quiet” (with no footnote); NASB has “peaceful” (with a footnote: “Lit., *complete*”); NIV has “quiet” (with no footnote), and NKJV has “mild” (with no footnote). The 1974 REPORT had recommended “plain” (with a footnote indicating the literal meaning) or as alternates “upright, straightforward, undeviating”.

ii. Recommendations were made for changes in Exod 21:22; 32:1, 4, 8; Deut 11:14, 15; 16:7.

In Exod 21:22, a woman with child is hurt in a struggle “so that there is a miscarriage” (RSV, with no footnote). The 1974 request of the Canadian Reformed Committee was to translate “so that her child is born” as being more faithful to the original which is literally “so that her children go out.” The term in question (*יָצָא*) is used for a normal birth and never for a miscarriage. NASB renders “so that she has a miscarriage” (footnote: “Lit., *her children come out*”). NIV renders “she gives birth prematurely” (footnote: “Or *she has a miscarriage*”). NKJV renders “so that she gives birth prematurely”. The NKJV and

NIV are to be preferred and the NASB is to be rejected.⁴

In Exod 32:1, 4, 8 the RSV translated “gods” (אֱלֹהִים) to describe the object of Israel’s worship in the making of the golden calf. The 1974 request of the Canadian Reformed Committee was to translate “god” since there is no reason to assume that Israel had become polytheistic. NASB renders “god” (footnote: “Or *gods*”); NIV and NKJV translate “gods” (and the NIV includes a footnote: “Or *a god*” on two occasions and not the third). The NASB is to be preferred.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV translate Deut 11:14, 15; 16:7 in a manner consistent with the recommendations of the 1974 REPORT.

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.

With one exception, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV translations of the above passages are consistent with the recommendations of the 1974 REPORT. The exception is one point in 1 Kings 7:24. The 1974 REPORT had recommended that כַּוָּעִים be rendered “knobs” rather than the more specific “gourds”. The NASB and NIV translate “gourds”, but the NKJV renders “buds”.⁵

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

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all translated Ps 2:12 and 51:18 consistent with the recommendations to the RSV in the 1974 REPORT. Interestingly, on Ps 2:12 NIV and NKJV translated the words in question by “Kiss the Son”, but the NASB rendered “Do homage to the Son” with a footnote “Lit., *Kiss ...*”.

On Job 17:3b, the RSV was asked to consider placing the literal translation in a footnote. The NKJV had the literal in the text

⁴ This passage has become very important in the struggle against abortion since the RSV rendering has been used to justify abortion. For a brief descriptive article on the history of exegesis, the main arguments and further literature see J. Ellington, “Miscarriage or Premature Birth?”, *The Bible Translator*, 37 (1986), 334-337. For a more readily accessible article, see C. Van Dam, “Is Unborn Life Human?”, *Clarion* 36:19 (1987).

⁵ W. Baumgartner and J. J. Stamm, (*Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon* [Leiden: Brill, 1983] Fasc. III, 904) define the term as “koloquintenförmige Zierat” (“gourd-like ornament”).

(“Who *is* he *who* will shake hands with me?”), the NASB puts it in a note (and has as text “Who is there that will be my guarantor?”), and the NIV gives a proper translation but no note for the literal text.

The translations of the difficult passage Job 36:21b are all in line with that of the RSV (and KJV).

The problem of Ps 29:1 concerns the translation of בְּנֵי אֱלֹהִים which RSV renders “heavenly beings” (with a note: “Heb *sons of gods*”). The Committee asked the RSV to consider rendering “sons of God”, referring to believers. On the other hand, the NASB, NIV and NKJV (and KJV) translations take כֹּחַ as “power, strength” which is possible, but seems less apt. Thus the NASB renders “sons of the mighty” (with note: “Or, *sons of gods*”); NIV and NKJV render “mighty ones” (with no note).

v. Recommendations were made for changes in Isa 49:17; Ezek 27:19; 34:16; Hos 12:6[7]; Zech 6:13.

The translations of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all consistent with the recommendations of the 1974 REPORT on the above passages, with the exception of the NKJV on Hos 12:6[7]. There the NKJV translation reads “So you, by *the help of* your God, return” (which is the same as the RSV). The recommendation reads much smoother and takes full account of the Hebrew, namely “So you, return to your God”.

2.2.1.2 1977 Report

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.

Most of these passages (all the more important ones) were translated in the NASB, NIV, and NKJV in such a way that they would not have occasioned these requests for change.

The NASB and NKJV basically translated Exod 11:1 and 1 Sam 10:16 like the RSV. NASB on Deut 18:1 should be rejected as inferior to NIV and NKJV since it appears that the tribe of Levi is the same (in apposition to) the Levitical priests.

The NIV translated Ps 136:10 in the line of the RSV and had its own translation of Zech 9:8.

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

With few exceptions, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV translations are consistent with the recommendations.

The NASB, like the RSV, both supplies “Jerusalem” in Isa 5:14 and adds a note indicating the literal Hebrew text.

The NIV (like the RSV) in Isa 5:17 emends the Hebrew text and notes this change which is based on the Septuagint. The change is not sufficiently warranted. In Isa 9:20[19], the NIV reads יָרַע as יָרַעַ and translates “his own offspring” with a note “Or *arm*”. This note is somewhat misleading for it masks the fact that a vocalic emendation took place. According to NIV policy, such emendations need not be recorded. Perhaps that policy should be reviewed. Emendation does not seem warranted here.

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 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.

The majority of the passages noted immediately above were translated by the NASB, NIV, and NKJV in a manner consistent with the recommendations.

Exceptions are as follows. On Luke 4:22 two recommendations on vocabulary were made. One of these suggestions was found in a note in the NASB and in the text of the NIV and NKJV.

In Rom 4:13, the NIV partly compensates for the lack in the RSV by rephrasing the sentence but leaves out “for”.

In Rom 8:10, the word “spirit” is not capitalized in NASB and NIV.

In Heb 6:14b the NIV in essence translates in line with our recommendation and clearly gets the point of the text across by rendering “and (surely) give you many descendants”, whereas the NKJV is too literal: “*multiplying I will multiply you*” (italics are also used for quotations). The first half of the verse is similarly literalistic in NKJV.

In Heb 12:24 both NASB and NIV supply “blood” in the phrase “better than the blood of Abel.”

2.2.2.2 1977 Report

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

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV translate the first two passages consistent with the recommendations.

In the case of 1 Cor 5:5 the NASB translates consistent with the recommendations but supplies “I have decided” in order to make it fit grammatically. The NIV and NKJV render in the line of the RSV and so pay less regard for the context than would be preferable.

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.

In most cases the NASB, NIV, and NKJV translations are consistent with the recommendations. There are however a number of exceptions, most of which deal with fine points of vocabulary.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV understand *ὁδομα* as traditionally done in Phil 1:17 (“think, suppose”) and also translate Phil 4:11 (second recommendation) in the traditional manner (“content” rather than the proposed “self-sufficient”).

In Phil 1:27 the NASB, and NKJV follow the line of the RSV. Perhaps the NIV is according to the recommendation. (The point at issue is whether it is better to render “of” or “concerning”; NIV translates “about”. In the context the meanings are close together.)

The NIV follows the RSV in:

Phil 1:16 by translating “put here for” rather than the recommended “appointed for”, and in

Phil 1:20 by translating “courage” instead of the recommended “boldness”.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all follow RSV in:

Phil 2:16 by translating “in the day” rather than “with a view to the day”.

Phil 2:22 by supplying a word to make the sense clear.

In Phil 3:7, the NIV translates the present quite emphatically, while the recommendation called for a perfect. (NASB and NKJV translate perfect.)

In Phil 3:15 the NASB and NKJV follow the line of the RSV in both instances. Regarding the second recommendation, the committee had counselled not to use the word “reveal” as if new revelation was forthcoming. NIV avoids this by rendering “God will make that clear to you”.

In Phil 4:11 the first recommendation called for clarity in translation. NASB and NKJV remain somewhat unclear.

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.

In the majority of these cases, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV were consistent with the preferred renderings of the 1977 REPORT. The NASB and the NKJV were the most consistent with the recommendations that were made. The NASB, NIV, and NKJV were all similar to the RSV in Heb 3:9 and 4:16. The NASB was also similar to the RSV in Heb 4:13; the NIV in Heb 1:6; 2:16, more or less in 3:12, and partly in Heb 6:15 (the rest of this verse is consistent with the recommendations made); and the NKJV was also like the RSV in Heb 1:12.

The NIV in Heb 2:14 supplies “humanity” which is better than the RSV’s “nature” and avoids possible philosophical problems. (The recommendation called for not supplying any noun). In Heb 6:16, the NIV does not account for ἀὐτοῖς in its translation.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

3.1 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

3.1.1 Considerations Arising Directly From the Synod Reports

i. The NASB, NIV, and NKJV in their translations are stronger on the doctrine of the Son and the Holy Spirit and so are great improvements over the RSV (cf. §§ 2.1.1.1.ii, vi and 2.1.2.1.i).

ii. The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all made special efforts to show the unity of Scripture by the way OT passages (which are referred to in the NT) are rendered and by the way NT passages alluding to OT passages are translated. This approach shows a high view of Scripture and is an improvement over the RSV (cf. § 2.1.1.1.v).

iii. Where the RSV exhibited the influence of critical scholarship and brought out unnecessary contradictions in the translation, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV were a great improvement (§ 2.1.2.1.ii,iii).

iv. In the vast majority of cases, specific recommendations for change in the RSV were not necessary for renderings given in the NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

While there were preferences that could be made among the NASB, NIV, and NKJV, in two cases, the NASB had to be rejected (for reasons similar to the rejection of the RSV renderings) because of the importance of the issues at stake (Exod 21:22 and Deut 18:1; see §§ 2.2.1.1.ii and 2.2.1.2.i).

v. With respect to the Old Testament text, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV hold it in much higher regard than the RSV (§ 2.1.1.1.iii). The question was raised whether the NIV should not indicate vocalic

emendations (§ 2.2.1.2.ii). With respect to the New Testament text, the concerns raised against the RSV are not nearly as applicable to the NASB and NIV, and to a certain extent the NKJV. The inclusion by the NKJV of the spurious reading of 1 John 5:7-8 does raise questions of their text policy (§ 2.1.1.1.i).

3.1.2 Other Related Considerations

As is clear from § 3.1.1.i-iii, the NASB, NIV, and NKJV can be characterized as more conservative and more faithful to the Scriptures. This is not without reason. The RSV was sponsored by churches associated with the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA through their International Council of Religious Education and thus the proportion of liberal scholars working on the translation was high.

The sponsorship and approach to the text of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV are unmistakably conservative. The NASB's foreword notes that this translation "has been produced with the conviction that the words of Scripture as originally penned in the Hebrew and Greek were inspired by God". The NIV had its origin in the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals, and as the Preface to this translation also goes on to note, "the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God's Word in written form." In a sense one can say that this translation is a conservative response to the RSV.⁶ The Preface to the NKJV is telling in its omission of any reference to the RSV. One gets the impression that the NKJV is the only true revision of the KJV. The translators who worked on this version were evangelical and all had to sign a document of subscription to the plenary and verbal inspiration of the original autographs of the Bible which were free from error.⁷

3.2 FINAL CONCLUSIONS

Among the criteria that were used in judging the RSV was the issue of how the original text was dealt with. In this context, it can be noted that the question was raised whether the NIV should not indicate vocalic emendations in the Hebrew text. This would be more accurate and up front (§ 2.2.1.2.ii). In the second place, it should also be noted here that a problem exists with the way the NKJV handles NT textual matters. In at least one instance it is serious enough to be a major obstacle to approving the NKJV for use in the churches (§ 2.1.1.1.i).

⁶ Cf., e.g., J. P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 324-327.

⁷ See Lewis, *The English Bible*, 329-331.

Another point was the manner of translation. In two cases, the NASB rendering had to be rejected because of the importance of the issues at stake (§§ 2.2.1.1.ii and 2.2.1.2.i).

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV are all better than the RSV according to the criteria that were used over the years to judge the RSV. It is very important to keep this fact in mind. The task of this committee is therefore to try to pick the best from what is basically a good group of translations.

Appendix 6

**Summary of
Canadian and Australian Synods
regarding Bible Translation**

What follows here are extracts from Acts of previous synods with respect to Bible translations, mostly as recorded under “Considerations,” as they pertained in particular to the NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

A. THE CANADIAN REFORMED CHURCHES

Synod Toronto 1974

Synod decides that the NASB should be studied, in addition to the ongoing work on the RSV.

Synod Coaldale 1976

Synod considers (item 7, page 56) “that a testing of the NASB and NIV in comparison with the RSV and the KJV will answer the question which of those translations is the best”, and decides (recommendation 1) “To broaden the mandate for the Committee on the RSV, changing its name into ‘Committee on Bible translations’”, and (2) “To add to its mandate: a. to make a comparative study of the NASB and the NIV with the RSV and the KJV, in order to determine which one translation can be positively recommended for use by the Churches, whereby the criteria are: faithfulness to the original text, and linguistic character of the translation.”

Synod Smithville 1980

Synod considers (item B.2) that “the comparative study reveals that none of the four translations investigated can be called unscriptural; however each translation suffers from some shortcomings.”

NASB	NIV
According to the Committee, lacks in “the beauty of its language and style and the clarity of expression”.	According to the Committee, “is not the most exact”. Synod considers (item B.8) that “The Majority and the Minority Reports both point to a lack of exactness and faithfulness with respect to the N.I.V. for its ‘free’ translation.”

Synod decides to recommend the use of the RSV and (recommendation 3) “To leave it in the freedom of the Churches to use the K.J.V. and the N.A.S.B., if the acceptance of the Revised Standard Version meets with insurmountable objections.”

Synod Winnipeg 1989

There are no considerations with respect to the NASB, NIV, or NKJV. Synod decides (recommendation 2) “to continue the Committee with the following mandate to the Committee: a. to scrutinize the NRSV Bible as soon as it becomes available with respect to faithfulness in translation, particularly in regard to the use of so-called inclusive language.”

Synod Lincoln 1992

Synod agrees (under Considerations, page 21) with the Committee for Bible Translations that the NRSV is unacceptable for use in the churches. “To prevent the possible isolation of the Canadian Reformed Churches with the usage of the RSV it is desirable to further investigate other translations.”

In the light of studies of Bible translations by deputies in the past, “as well as in consideration of the letters received from the churches, Synod should see to it that an evaluation is undertaken of the NASB, NIV and NKJV.”

Synod’s decision then follows, it being the mandate of our committee.

B. THE FREE REFORMED CHURCHES OF AUSTRALIA

Synod Armadale 1990

NASB	NIV	NKJV
<p>Synod considered (Item 4c): “It appears that overall the NASB is a more reliable translation than the RSV. Noting deputies’ summing up: the NASB’s wooden style, lack of clarity and poor readability are its major drawbacks’ [p17] we conclude that the NASB is still worthy of further consideration;”</p>	<p>Synod considers (item 4e): “...this poses the question which approach has dominated in the NIV, i.e. where on the alleged ‘continuum’ between D(ynamic) E(quivalent) and F(ormal) E(qui-valent) the NIV translation is located. This whole matter needs also to be reconciled with other references to the effect that the NIV tends to be an interpretive rather than accurate translation.”</p>	<p>Synod considers (item 4d): “On the criterion of reliability [p21] it is difficult to accept deputies preference for the RSV with its liberal tendencies over against the NKJV which they themselves judge to be a translation that ‘has not followed the RSV in that translation’s ap-parent surrender to liberal influences.’ Since we should not accept or reject any translation on choice of text alone [Cons 2], the NKJV should be further investigated with respect to loss of reliability as a result of text choice and method of translation;”</p>

Synod further considers (item 7): “In summary, every one of these translations has some drawbacks. A perfect or near-perfect translation does not exist”, and (item 8): “On the information available, a responsible decision in favour of an alternative translation cannot be made at this time. Further evaluation is required. On the criteria of reliability and consistency in maintaining unity of Scripture the NASB [consideration 4c] and NKJV [consideration 4d] appear to be acceptable translations for such evaluation. Both use basically the FE approach. The NIV [4e and 6] with its mixed FE/DE approach needs to be further evaluated on reliability.”

Synod’s decision follows, consisting of 6 points, among which the following are germane to this study:

- (4) “to declare at this time already that the NASB, NKJV and NIV are deemed better translations than the RSV;
- (5) “to express caution over the DE approach to translation;
- (6) “to appoint new deputies with the following instructions:

- (b) as regards the NASB, NKJV and NIV translations, to supplement the 1989 report and:
1. to further study in line with considerations 4.c and 4.d the suitability of NASB and NKJV to replace the RSV;
 2. to further evaluate the NIV in line with considerations 4.e and 6, in respect of its method of translation;
 3. to make use of previous deputies' reports including those of our Canadian sister-churches;
 7. to consult with the CanRC to see whether a common approach can be reached;"

Synod Bedfordale 1992

NASB	NIV	NKJV
<p>Under Considerations (item 4): "The NASB has been studied by various deputies in the past. Repeatedly the same criticism is heard concerning this Synod considers (item B.8) that "The Majority and the Minority Reports of the Committee both point to a lack of exactness and faith-fulness with respect to the N.I.V. for its 'free' translation."translation; its translation style is too stilted for use in the worship services. There is therefore little point in subjecting this version to yet another scrutiny of the same points."</p>	<p>Under Considerations (item 6): "Despite deputies' reports favouring the NIV in 1975 and in 1990, the churches in Synod have consistently felt that the DE method of translating was the major hindrance to the adoption of the NIV for use in the churches. Current deputies come to the same conclusion." ".....there appears to be no worthy benefits to subjecting (the translation method used by) the NIV to another round of scrutiny."</p>	<p>Deputies had recommended further study of this translation and that a "common approach be pursued with the Canadian sister churches". Under items 11, 12, & 13, Synod considers that "...it is best that the attention of the churches now be directed to the NKJV for use in the churches, in the homes and in the schools", adding "the recommendation is rather made on the basis of its overall positive qualities. As such, this recommendation should not be under-stood as if the FRCA is making a distinct choice for the Textus Receptus as opposed to other manuscript types".</p>

Synod's decision consists of ten recommendations among which we considered the following germane to our study:

- (7) "to recommend to the churches that the NKJV be used for study, instruction, and family purposes;"
- (8) to withhold final endorsement of the NKJV in the church services until
 - a. the churches have become familiar with this version and so are able to evaluate it from hands-on experience, and
 - b. more study has been made of the NKJV in comparison with the NIV.
- (9) to leave room for the use of the NKJV in the churches if consistories so wish;
- (10) to appoint new deputies with the mandate:
 - a. to continue studies of the NKJV, in comparison with the NIV, to determine whether the NKJV can be endorsed as a final recommendation to the churches. The areas of study should include:
 - whether Old Testament textual sources are properly used;
 - the extent and seriousness of the loss of reliability resulting from the chosen method of translation;
 - d. "to communicate this decision, together with the reports of deputies serving Synod 1990 and Synod 1992, to deputies from the Canadian Reformed Churches prior to their Synod in November 1992, urging the brotherhood in Canada to reach a similar decision;"
 - f. "to monitor how the NKJV is received in the churches with a view to whether this version is worthy of final endorsement".

Synod Byford 1994

At the time of our report the Acts were not yet available. This committee requested and did receive the pertinent decision made by this Synod, consisting of six items from which we quote those we considered directly related to our study.

- (3) "To endorse the NKJV as a faithful and reliable translation for use in the churches, as well as for study, instruction and family purposes.

- (4) To allow the NIV to be used in the church services, and for study, instruction and family purposes.”
- (6) “To appoint new deputies with the following instruction:
 - a. to inform the CanRC of this decision and remain in touch with the Canadian deputies about developments there;”

Two of the three grounds adduced read as follows:

- (1) “Our previous synods, have found the NKJV to be a faithful and reliable translation and have allowed the use of it in the churches. Synod 1992 withheld final endorsement of the NKJV in order to evaluate its reception in the churches. That the NKJV is well received is evident from the fact that some of the congregations in the federation already use the NKJV.
- (2) Since the weaknesses of NIV are the strengths of the NKJV (and vice versa) the NIV should be considered for the use in the churches, and as with the NKJV a period of evaluation should be given before final endorsement.”

NOTES ON STYLE

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1.0 CAPITALIZATION (including a short note on “Thee/Thou”)

Different questions arise with capitalization. Is it good to capitalize Old Testament quotations, as the NKJV and the NASB do? Is it warranted to print the beginning word of each chapter in capitals, as the NASB does everywhere and the NKJV does in the Psalms? More questions could be raised, such as the use of capitals in geographical descriptions or names. One can also think of the use of capitals at the beginning of phrases in new lines of typesetting in poetry (NASB and NKJV). The issue here, however, is quite restricted, namely the use of capitals when God is referred to.

1.1 Policy Statements Concerning References to God

NASB: “Personal pronouns are capitalized when pertaining to Deity” (from the *Explanation of General Format*). This note fails to mention that the NASB also capitalizes terms referring to God.

NIV: Although this translation has no stated policy in its Preface on capitalization with references to God, it does use capitals for terms referring to God, but not the pronouns.

NKJV: After mentioning that thee, thou and other archaic forms are eliminated from their translation, it is stated: “However, reverence for God in the present work is preserved by capitalizing pronouns, including *You*, *Your*, and *Yours*, which refer to Him. Additionally, capitalization of these pronouns benefits the reader by clearly distinguishing divine and human persons referred to in a passage. Without such capitalization the distinction is often obscure, because the antecedent of a pronoun is not always clear in the English translation” (from the *Preface*). NKJV capitalizes terms referring to God.

It appears from the above that the translations were motivated by showing reverence to God by these special usages.

1.2 Observations and Considerations

a. There is nothing in the original languages that would justify special “encoding” in the way words are written in order to distinguish between a reference to God or man.

b. The concern for special capitalization is a relatively new phenomenon in English. There are, for example, no special capitals in pronominal or adjectival references to God in the Tyndale Bible (1536), Genevan Bible (1560), KJV (1611), Staten Vertaling (1637), American Standard Version (1885), and the RSV. In the past some terms referring to God have been capitalized, as for example “Ancient of days” (Dan 7:9 in KJV and SV, but not in ASV and RSV). However, this usage is not nearly as comprehensive as that found in the newer translations under discussion here.

c. The NASB has not been consistent in its use of capitals when referring to God. When the Lord Jesus is referred to in the gospels, then the second person pronoun is usually capitalized, even when used by those who do not regard the Lord Jesus with honour (Matt 21:23; 22:16, 17; 26:68). However, there is no consistency. The third person is sometimes in small letters (Matt 12:23). Old Testament references to Christ are capitalized (e.g. Ps 2:2, 6, 12), but not, for instance, in Gen 3:15; Gen 49:10 and Num 24:17. Invariably also questions arise why some references are capitalized and others not. For example, in the Messianic Psalms, the pronouns are capitalized in Psalm 45 but not 22. More examples of inconsistency can be given.¹

¹ See J. P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV*, (2nd ed.; Grand Rapids:

Also the NIV has its difficulties, although they are considerably less than the NASB because of the more restrictive use of capitals in the NIV.

The NIV is not entirely consistent in capitalizing terms that are Messianic items in the New Testament. The terms ‘prophet’ (Deut 18:15, 18, 19; cf. Acts 3:22-23; 7:37), ‘priest’ (Ps 110:4; cf. Heb 5:6), ‘servant’ (Isa 52:13) and ‘king’ (Zech 9:9) are uncapitalized. Capitalization alternates are suggested for ‘Son’ (Ps 2:7, 12) and ‘Anointed One’ (Dan 9:26). It would probably have been better not to capitalize Messianic terms in the Old Testament.²

Although “name” is used twice in Jer 34:15-16, it is only capitalized once. If there is doubt about whether the reference is to God or to a human, alternates are given in notes (so, e.g., regarding “lord” in Josh 5:14, “spirit” in Zech 12:10, and “holy one” in 1 Sam 2:2). The difficulty is that the reader is unnecessarily confronted with the interpretative preferences of the translators which according to the original text is not necessary.

As far as the NKJV is concerned, observations similar to those of the NASB can be noted. With its quite comprehensive capitalization policy respecting references to God, it is not surprising that questions arise. Why, for example, have a capital in reference to Jesus when it is clearly used in the mouth of those who do not confess him as the Christ? (So, e.g., John 10:33: “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God”. Similarly Matt 27:13, 40).³

d. The above demonstrates that capitalization has its pitfalls. It also unnecessarily introduces an interpretative element that would be better left for exegesis. For example, both the NASB and the NKJV capitalize “I AM” in John 8:58. If it is correct to capitalize “I AM” in John 8:58, why then not also capitalize “I am” in John 8:24? Secondly, is it correct to imply by the capitalization that “I AM” is in effect a proper name? Unwittingly perhaps, the capitalization (by treating it as a proper name) reduces the significance of the phrase that Jesus uses and introduces a static element into the translation that can militate against the point that the Lord makes, namely to testify to His divinity in a very rich and profound way.⁴

Baker, 1991) 179-180 and R. G. Bratcher in a review of the NASB in *The Bible Translator*, 13 (1962) 235.

² Lewis, *The English Bible*, 297.

³ See further, Lewis, *The English Bible*, 332, 343. A similar point is made by H. F. Peacock in a review of the NKJV in *The Bible Translator*, 31 (1980), 339.

⁴ See, e.g., W. Hendriksen, *Exposition of the Gospel According to John* (NTC; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1954) 46, 67 and L. Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 447, 473-474.

Another example of the interpretative element that capitalization brings with it pertains to the Messianic Psalms. It is not the task of translators to decide whether a text should be interpreted messianically in the first instance or not and to indicate that in the translation. It is an impossible task since a text often has an initial reference to a human being living at that time, as well as a further reference to the promised Messiah (cf., e.g., Psalm 22).⁵

Any ambiguity in the original text should be retained in the translation so that the translation can be as accurate as possible.

1.3 Conclusion

The capitalization policy pertaining to God in the NASB and NKJV, and to a lesser extent in the NIV, introduces an element in the translation that is not in the original and so is better left out. Inconsistencies and needless interpretative decisions are inevitable and the translation consequently suffers for it becomes less able to reflect both the precision as well as the ambiguity that may exist in the original, especially concerning prophetic or Messianic passages.

1.4 Thee/Thou

Related to the use of capitals, is the usage of Thee and Thou by the NASB. (The NIV and the NKJV have both opted for “You/Your”.) Reverence for God is thought to be shown by the archaic usage. It should however be noted that, in the first place, there is nothing in the original languages nor in the tradition of English Bibles to justify such usage of antiquated terms as indicative of reverence for God.

Secondly, this usage again introduces an interpretative element into the text that is unwarranted and can hinder the correct understanding. (See examples given by Lewis immediately below.)

Thirdly, the NASB is predictably not consistent in using this distinction and given the intricacies of combining sixteenth century Elizabethan grammar with modern English, this attempt of the NASB does not make for easier reading or comprehension. As Lewis notes:

The NASB displays a hybrid mixture of old English pronouns and current English verbs; for example, in Psalm 45:7 “has” occurs, but in the citation of the same Psalm in Hebrews 1:9 “hath” is found. The NASB runs aground in its effort to determine when to retain the traditional “Thou”, “Thine”, and “Thee” with appropriate old English verbal forms. The old forms are retained in the Psalms, in address to divinity, and in the language of prayer (e.g., Acts 4:25). Saul (Acts

⁵ Also cf. Lewis, *The English Bible*, 180.

9:5; 22:8, 19, 20; 26:15), Ananias (Acts 9:13), and people in heaven in the Book of Revelation (Rev. 4:11; 5:9, 10) use the old forms. But in the Gospels, people are represented at the judgment as saying “You” to the final judge (Matt 7:22; 25:37, 44). The quotation from Malachi (Matt 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27) only merits a “you”; “your face ... your way.” During his earthly career and after his resurrection, Jesus is addressed as “You” by his disciples (Matt 14:28, 33; Mark 2:18; Acts 1:6), his brothers (John 7:3, 4), the Pharisees (Matt 22:16), the high priest (Matt 26:62), and Pilate (Matt 27:13). “You” and “Your” are capitalized in these statements though not capitalized elsewhere when referring to man. Why should “Thou” be used in the confession at the baptism (Mark 1:11) and in the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:16; Mark 8:29) and “You” be used in the equally confessional statements of John 1:38 and 6:68, 69? The whole problem could have been avoided by using “you” throughout.⁶

We should not insist on retaining the archaic forms of Thee and Thou (and related forms) or oppose their inevitable demise. We could only try to retain this feature out of custom and tradition. It has no Biblical warrant. It also has no justification, for instance, in the history of the KJV. Thee and Thou were the normal ways of speaking in the sixteenth century. This element should therefore play no part in deciding on a translation for the churches.

2.0 ITALICS

The two translations of the three under discussion to utilize italics are the NASB and the NKJV. The NIV uses italics for sectional headings “as an aid to the reader”, but the *Preface* specifically notes that they are not to be considered part of the text.

2.1 Policy Statements Concerning Italics

2.1.1 Italics for words implied in the original

NASB: “ITALICS are used in the text to indicate words which are not found in the original Hebrew or Greek but implied by it. Italics are used in the marginal notes to signify alternate readings for the text” (from the *Explanation of General Format*).

⁶ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 196. Other examples where the use of “You” rather than “Thou” can be questioned include: Matt 24:3; Mark 10:28; John 11:27; 21:17.

NKJV: “Words or phrases in *italics* indicate expressions in the original language which require clarification by additional English words, as also done throughout the history of the King James Bible” (from the *Preface*).

2.1.2 Observations and Considerations

a. When the New Testament quotes from the Old, no device is used in the text to indicate which words may have been supplied in order for the translation to make sense. Indeed, the practice of indicating “extra” words which are not in the original is a relatively recent one in the long history of Bible translation. The first to give special indicators was Sebastian Münster who bracketed such words in his Latin Old Testament of 1534-35. The practice of making distinctions eventually found its way into the KJV tradition and it was not until the RSV that the practice was stopped, only to be picked up again by the NASB.⁷

b. The KJV in which tradition both the NASB and the NKJV wish to stand used italics primarily for reasons which revolved on the problem of translating from an ancient language to a modern one. Another reason included indicating words of doubtful authority from a text critical point of view. The varying number of italics in the different editions of the KJV indicates something of the problems associated with italics and how they were understood or misunderstood.⁸ Today, a major problem is that italics are normally reserved for emphasis, and italics are certainly prone to be misunderstood by modern readers.

c. The question can be raised whether the use of italics does not make for a false dilemma. If a translation cannot do without supplying a word which is understood in the original, is it then a less than faithful translation, or would it be an unfaithful translation if the word was not supplied? For example, the Hebrew nominal sentence וְהַכְנַעֲנִי אֶזְרָאִי (Gen 12:6) is rendered in the NASB: “Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land” (similarly NKJV which uses the plural *were*). But, unlike Hebrew, it is impossible to make an English sentence without the verb. The italics are superfluous and misleading. Indeed, exactly the same construction in Amos 7:14 where the Hebrew also lacks the verb “to be” (לֹא-נָבִיא אֲנִי) is translated by NASB without italics: “I am not a prophet” (NKJV does have italics: “I *was* no prophet”).

Besides Hebrew syntax, one can also take an example from vocabulary. פָּנָה in Ps 118:22 (הֲיֵתָה לְרֵאשׁ פָּנָה) can only

⁷ See J. Lewis, “Italics in English Translation” in M. Inch and R. Youngblood, eds., *The Living and Active Word of God. Essays in Honor of Samuel J. Schultz* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 255-261.

⁸ See Lewis, “Italics in English Bible Translation”, 256-260.

mean “cornerstone” (and indeed this is what NKJV has), but NASB has “corner *stone*”. This use of italics is quite unnecessary as the NASB itself indicates by translating “cornerstone” for *נקוד* in Isa 28:16.⁹

d. The use of italics to indicate additions can leave translators open to the temptation to add unnecessarily to the text, especially by way of interpretative additions. One could rationalize such an addition by saying that the reader knows it is not in the original for the word is italicized. For example, concerning the NASB it has been noted that frequently an idea is sharpened or restricted by an added word when no addition is actually necessary such as “you *alone*” (Gen 7:1), or an entire phrase can be added, such as “*He added*” (Mark 6:9). Many more examples could be given, also from the NKJV.¹⁰

2.1.3 Conclusions

For the reasons adduced above, the use of italics for words implied in the original can be considered a significant detrimental element when weighing the suitability of the NASB and the NKJV for use in the churches. Furthermore, the English reader has no way of knowing whether the italics make a meaningful point, or whether they are even necessary.¹¹

2.2.1 Italics for OT quotations in the NT

NKJV: “*Oblique type* in the New Testament indicates a quotation from the Old Testament”.

2.2.2 Observations and Considerations

a. The difference between oblique and italicized type is very difficult to see and can only be ascertained if the two are in close proximity to each other. Compare, e.g., the appearance of the letter “a” in Acts 7:31-32. In *saying*, the letters are italicized and in *am* the letters are in oblique type.

b. Because the type is practically identical for the untrained eye of the average Bible reader, the distinction between oblique type for quotations and italicized type for words supplied is very confusing.

⁹ For a good discussion on implicit and explicit information and the problems this brings for translators, see J. Beekman and J. Callow, *Translating the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1974), 45-66.

¹⁰ See Lewis, “Italics in English Bible Translations”, 262-263 and similarly idem, *The English Bible*, 185-186. For the NKJV see *Ibid.*, 343-344.

¹¹ Cf. Further, Lewis, “Italics in English Bible Translations”, 269-270.

c. There is no special encoding in the New Testament Greek to make the distinctions that are made here.

2.2.3 Conclusion

The NKJV policy of printing quotations in a type which is practically indiscernible from italics is not a good policy and has no convincing rationale. It can be confusing and thus hinders the reading of Scripture.

3.0 RED LETTERING

Red letter editions are found in many Bible versions and are also available in NASB, NIV, and NKJV. In such editions the words of Jesus are printed in red. This is a fairly recent phenomenon, first introduced in 1899¹² and it is a practice that should be rejected. By printing the words of Jesus in red, an artificial distinction is made between the one divine and authoritative Word and the other. Such editions seem to be very popular, judging from a recent catalogue, but we should warn against it. Black letter editions are available in NASB, NIV, and NKJV.

4.0 PARAGRAPHS AND VERSES

The KJV treated each verse as a separate paragraph, a practice it borrowed from the Geneva Bible. Prior to that time, paragraphing was a known practice in translating. The ASV returned to this method and did hesitate to carry a paragraph right through from chapter to chapter (2 Kgs 24:20) or to start a new paragraph in the middle of a verse (Isa 59:15).¹³ The NASB and the NKJV have returned to treating each verse typographically as a separate paragraph and indicated new paragraphs (expressing a unit of thought) with bold face verse number or letters. (See NASB's *Explanation of General Format* and the NKJV's *Preface*.) In later editions of the NASB and the NKJV, these translations have gone to typographical paragraphing. The NIV has done typographical paragraphing from the beginning.

Since all the translations under investigation are now available in text paragraph form (which seems most desirable for readability),

¹² Lewis, *The English Bible*, 331.

¹³ Lewis, *The English Bible*, 51, 81.

this feature is not a factor in deciding on a preference between these translations.

**THE NIV RECONSIDERED
BY MEN BEHIND THE NKJV**

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Books that are critical of a Bible translation are of particular interest to our purpose. In the midst of all the accolades that the NIV has received, it is good to pay attention to one that is critical as well: *The NIV Reconsidered: A Fresh look at a Popular Translation*.¹ Unfortunately, the world of Bible translations is not unlike the world of politics: the one party heaping accusations against the other. The criticism voiced deserves our attention nevertheless. As a discussion of the whole book would involve more time and effort than that which is available, a detailed evaluation of one chapter will have to suffice to give us an indication of the value of the book and the validity of the charges. Here follows an evaluation of chapter 6, called “Significant New Testament Texts.”

1.0 CAN “**porneiva**” BE TRANSLATED BY “MARITAL UNFAITHFULNESS”?

Matthew 19:9

NIV: ⁹ I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for **marital unfaithfulness**, and marries another woman commits adultery."

NKJV: ⁹ "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for **sexual immorality**, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery."

NA26: ⁹ levgw deV uJmi'n o{ti o}" a]n ajpoluvsh/ thVn gunai'ka aujtou' mhV ejpiV **porneiva**/kaiV gamhvsh/ a]llhn moica'tai.

The Charge

Radmacher and Hodges claim that “marital unfaithfulness” is a euphemistic rendering of the Greek word *porneiva*/, which is at once too broad and too restrictive. They warn against a clear danger that “unfaithfulness” will be taken by some in a broader sense. “Is a married man who behaves flirtatiously being ‘unfaithful’?” Moreover, is it clear that premarital immorality, as well as homosexual acts, could also be referred to? In short, the NIV is too vague, and the NASB’s “immorality” or NKJV’s “sexual immorality” to be preferred.

Considerations

¹ By Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges, (Dallas: Redencion Viva, 1990), 65-83. Hereafter referred to as R&H.

1. R&H have oversimplified a complex and thorny issue. They have not adequately recognized that *porneiva/* is a very broad word, meaning “*prostitution, unchastity, fornication, of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse.*”² It’s also important to remember that *porneiva/* is not the same as *moiceiva/* “*adultery, sexual intercourse*”.
2. Moreover, does “marital unfaithfulness” not take within its grasp such things as homosexual acts? Is a married man who does everything else but the actual sexual act not guilty of *porneiva/*? The idea that *porneiva/* might refer to premarital immorality is a dubious exegesis; cf. D.A. Carson on Matthew³; if there is any situation in which Matthew 19:9 would apply to the premarital state, surely the translation “marital unfaithfulness” would not negate that.
3. It is also nothing short of misleading for R&H to fail to convey that in 4 of the 7 other passages in which *porneiva/* occurs, the NIV *has* translated it as “sexual immorality” (1 Cor.5:1; 1 Cor.6:13; Gal.5:19; Eph.5:3; cf. Matt.5:32 “marital unfaithfulness”; 2 Cor.12:21 “sexual sin”; Rev. 19:2 “adulteries”).
4. It is also misleading not to note that it is the context that has decided why only in Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9 they have translated the word as “marital unfaithfulness.” In the context, that translation makes it clear that the reason someone *can* divorce without committing adultery himself in some cases is because marital unfaithfulness has already taken place.
5. While R&H are agreeable to the NASB translation “immorality”, this is questionable because clearly it is *sexual* immorality that is in view and not, e.g. immorality re the eighth commandment! This may be the strongest argument against NIV translation: the marital unfaithfulness is not, e.g. economic, but sexual. But even the context (adultery) makes that clear!

Response

While “sexual immorality” is a good translation and probably still suits both Matthew 5:32 and Matthew 19:9, R&H go too far when they judge

² Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Second edition, (Chicago, 1993, p. 693. Hereafter referred to as BAG.

³ In *Expositor’s*, vol. 8, p.414. Carson critiques Mark Geldard (“Jesus’ Teaching on Divorce,” *Churchman* 92 (1978), pp. 134-43) who maintains that if a man discovers his bride is not a virgin he may divorce her, and suggests that such an interpretation would only be feasible if the context forced us to understand this general word in such a specific way.

that “marital unfaithfulness” in Matthew 19:9 is inaccurate and “less than acceptable.”

2.0 ACTIVE AND PASSIVE VERBS

John 3:6

NIV: ^εFlesh **gives birth** to flesh, but the Spirit **gives birth** to spirit. NKJV: ^ε"That which **is born** of the flesh is flesh, and that which **is born** of the Spirit is spirit.

NA26: ^ε toV **gegennhmevnon** ejk th" sarkoV" savrx ejstin, kaiV toV **gegennhmevnon** ejk tou' pnevmato" pneu'mav ejstin.

The Charge

The NIV act of changing the passives into active verbs is considered a “pointless rewriting” and “semantically ambiguous”; it is thought to be open to misinterpretation as “flesh” could equal “mankind” and thus be thought to mean “human beings give birth to human beings.”

Considerations

1. The change of passives to actives is a significant step in writing clear English. English experts comment, for instance, that “the active voice is usually more direct and vigorous than the passive.”⁴ Surely for a translation to change passive verbs in every case into actives would be wrong and change the meaning of many texts,⁵ but the NIV only does so in some instances. One could argue that in this instance it is justified; the NIV is considerably more forceful here than other translations are, as is the Greek.
2. The necessity of rejecting a translation because it’s open to misinterpretation depends on how obvious and likely the misinterpretation is. Besides, is not every translation open to misinterpretation? Moreover, is the possible misinterpretation avoided if the verbs are left in the passive?

Response

⁴ W. Strunk jr. And E.B. White, *The Elements of Style*, (New York: MacMillan), p.18.

⁵ Strunk and White comment here: “this rule does not, of course, mean that the writer should entirely discard the passive voice, which is frequently convenient and sometimes necessary,” *Ibid*.

While a translation which retains the passives would be adequate, the NIV translation may be justified.

3.0 “FAITH IN HIS BLOOD?”

Romans 3:25

NIV: ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, **through faith in his blood**. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished...

NKJV: ²⁵ whom God set forth as a propitiation **by His blood, through faith**, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed,

NA26: ²⁵ o]n proevqeto oJ qeoV iJlasthvrion **diaV [th"] pivstew" ejn tw'/ aujtou' ai{mati eij" e[ndeixin th" dikaiosvnh" aujtou' diaV thVn pavresin tw'n progegonovtwn aJmarthmavtwn.**

The Charge

R&H express surprise and disappointment at the fact that the NIV has connected “in his blood” with “faith” rather than with the propitiatory sacrifice mentioned in this verse.

Considerations

1. The NIV is following the exact word order of the Greek and is, in this respect, being more literal (!) than other modern translations.
2. It is rather disappointing to notice that R&H do not make any mention of the fact that the NIV is translating it in the same manner as a translation which they so highly esteem, namely, the KJV (“Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation through faith in his blood...”).
3. It seems to be true that **ejn tw'/ aujtou' ai{mati** should be linked with **iJlasthvrion** rather than with **diaV [th"] pivstew"**. The expression “faith in his blood” is quite foreign to the rest of the NT, while there is certainly a great deal of Biblical basis for taking it with the idea of sacrifice.
4. Expert grammarians are of the opinion that **ejn tw'/ aujtou' ai{mati** is an instrumental dative of price “at the cost of his blood”(cf. Rom.5:9, Rev.5:9)⁶.

⁶ N. Turner, *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*. Volume 3 of Moulton and Milligan. (T.&T.Clark, 1963), p.253; A.T. Robertson, *A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, (Broadman, 1934), p. 589.

5. It is probably best to take *diaV [th''] pivstew* as a parenthesis, as the NKJV and the RSV do and to translate the verse “God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith, at the cost of his blood....”

Response

R&H rightly refer to the need for an improvement on the NIV’s translation of Romans 3:25, but their alarmism is surprising given the fact that the King James Version gave the same translation at that point.

4.0 HOW SHOULD WE TRANSLATE *savrX*?

4.1 Flesh as “sinful nature”?

1 Corinthians 5:5

NIV: *Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.*

NKJV: *Hand over such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

NA26: *paradou'nai toVn toiou'ton tw/ Satana/ eij" o[leqron th'' sarkov'', i{na toV pneu'ma swqh'/ ejn th'/ hJmevra/ tou' kurivou.*

The Charge

R&H maintain that the phrase “so that *the sinful nature* may be destroyed” sounds like a “statement affirming eradicationism.” They complain that the reader would have a hard time understanding from this that the man was to be handed over to Satan so that he would forsake his wicked way. “Who would ever guess that this is the intended meaning of the NIV text....”

Considerations

1. One cannot read the above charge without thinking that if the NIV had translated *savrX* as “flesh”, it may very well be accused of teaching that someone can yet be saved after death. Surely it was precisely because of this that the NIV chose to translate as it did. A translation like the NKJV here suggests to the English reader that after one’s flesh or body has been destroyed by Satan at death, his spirit will yet be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus!?
2. The NIV is rightly trying to make it clear that it is not the body but the sinful nature that is to be destroyed. Says G. D. Fee, “What this means then, is that we have a typically Pauline contrast between ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’....What Paul was desiring by having this man put

outside the believing community was the destruction of what was ‘carnal’ in him, so that he might be ‘saved’ eschatologically. In this case, as most often in Paul, ‘flesh’ and ‘spirit’ designate ‘the whole person as viewed from different angles. ‘Spirit’ means the whole person as oriented towards God. ‘Flesh’ means the whole person as oriented away from God. The ‘destruction’ of one’s sinful nature would thus belong to the same kind of imagery as in ‘crucifying’ it (Gal.5:24; cf. Rom. 7:5-6).⁷ Robertson and Plummer interpret the text in the same manner: “The sinner was handed over to Satan for the ‘mortification of the flesh,’ *i.e.* to destroy his sinful lusts...”⁸ Likewise, Grosheide: “De overgave aan den Satan heeft dus ten doel den ondergang van het zondige vleesch.”⁹

Response

R&H are looking in the wrong place here in their search to take issue with the NIV. To disagree with one translation because it is open to misinterpretation is hardly an adequate basis. The case in point illustrates the fact that there are very few, if any, translations of a text that are not open to misinterpretation. Peter already warned us that there were difficult passages in Paul “which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Peter 3:16). But it is our task to give the best translation possible in a broken world. The NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 5:5 is a good one.

4.2 Flesh as “body”?

1 Timothy 3:16

NIV: ¹⁶ Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great: He appeared in a **body**, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

NKJV: ¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the **flesh**, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

⁷ *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, (Eerdmans, 1987), p.212. Compare also the comments of H. N. Ridderbos on this text in *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, (Eerdmans, 1975), p.471.

⁸ A. Robertson and A. Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, (T. & T. Clark, 1978), p.99.

⁹ *De Eerste Brief van den Apostel Paulus aan de Kerk te Korinthe*. Kommentaar op het Nieuwe Testament, (H.A. Van Bottenburg, 1932), p.179.

NA26: 16 kaiV oJmologoumevnw" mevga ejstiVn toV th" eujsebeiva" musthvrion: }O" ejfanerwvqh ejn **sarkiv**, ejdikaiwvqh ejn pneumati, w[fqh ajggevoi", ejkhruvcqh ejn e[qnesin, ejpisteuvqh ejn kovsmw/, ajnelhvmfqh ejn dovxh/.

The Charge

R&H claim that the NIV's work on this verse is nothing short of a "mistranslation." Once again, the ground for the charge is the fact that it is liable to be misunderstood by heretics, namely, Docetists who would supposedly be quite comfortable with the assertion that Jesus "appeared in a body" but would have objected to the thought that He "was manifested in the flesh." Thus, R&H claim "this is a classic example of paraphrase gone astray."

Considerations

1. R&H are not just attacking the translators of the NIV here, but in fact much of the scholarly world. It's an elementary principle that the same Greek word is not necessarily to be translated by the same English word in every instance. BAG give *savrx* no fewer than eight meanings, one of them being "*the body* itself viewed as substance." In both Kittel¹⁰ as well as BAG¹¹ many examples from both classical Greek literature and the New Testament are given wherein *savrx* refers to the human body or man's existence in the body. Some obvious ones are 2 Cor. 4:10, Phil.1:24. Of striking interest is 1 Cor. 6:16 where *sw`ma* and *savrx* are used synonymously.
2. The fact that the NIV footnote reads here "Or *in the flesh*" should satisfy some of R&H's concerns.

Response

R&H have engaged in overkill. While "flesh" would be a good translation and may be preferred, it goes too far to call the NIV's work here a "mistranslation" or a "paraphrase gone astray." Paul's reference is not to his predominant meaning of the word, but to the incarnation of our Lord, and that is clearer from the NIV than from the NKJV.

5.0 "STOLE" OR "HAS BEEN STEALING"?

Ephesians 4:28

¹⁰ *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, VII, p. 99-100, 125.

¹¹ p.743-4.

NIV: ²⁸ He who **has been stealing** must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

NKJV: ²⁸ Let him who **stole** steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.

NA26: ²⁸ **oJ klevptwn** mhkevti kleptevtw, ma'llon deV kopiavtw ejrgazovmeno" tai'" [ijdivai "] cersiVn toV ajgaqovn, i{na e[ch/ metadidovnai tw'/ creivan e[conti.

The Charge

R&H, claiming that the issue involved is more serious than it appears on the surface, claim that the NIV “has here understood the underlying Greek construction (a definite article plus a present participle) as though it referred to activity that has been in progress in the recent past (‘has been stealing’). The NKJV assigns the action to the past, without the attendant implication that it has been happening in the *recent* past. The NKJV permits a contrast with a former lifestyle. The issue, of course, is whether the activity of stealing is one which Paul assigns to the unconverted days of some (or a few) of his readers, or whether he thinks they still engage in this practice.”

Considerations

1. The strange thing here is that R&H themselves acknowledge that “the Greek construction does not solve the question, since the construction is basically timeless.” The Greek does not tell us whether the action is in the recent or more distant past. The only issue is that the NIV has introduced “a new note into a familiar text.”
2. It is not apparent that there really is a difference between “he who stole” and “he who has been stealing.” Besides, if “he who stole” refers to the real distant past, would that not reduce the significance of Paul’s next comment, “let him steal no longer,” since he has already ceased from stealing?

Response

R&H are making a mountain out of a molehill here. The NIV translation is a good one.

6.0 HOW TO TRANSLATE SUBJECTIVE GENITIVES?

1 Thessalonians 1:3

NIV: ³ We continually remember before our God and Father **your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ.

NKJV: ³ remembering without ceasing **your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father,

NA26: ³ mnhmoneuvonte" uJmw'n **tou' e[rgou th'" pivstew" kaiV tou' kovpou th'" ajgavph" kaiV th'" uJpomoh'" th'" ejlpivdo"** tou' kurivou hJmw'n jlhsou' Cristou' e[mprosqen tou' qeou' kaiV patroV" hJmw'n,

The Charge

The concern of R&H here is that the NIV has not translated literally but has shown in its translation that it understands the genitives to be subjective: “your work *produced by* faith, your labor *prompted by* love, and your endurance *inspired by* hope...”. R&H claim that this is a matter of “overtranslating,” which may very well wind up falsifying the author’s actual thought. Perhaps these are “genitives of description” (“your believing act,” etc.) or objective genitives (“obedience to the faith”) or genitives of apposition (“obedience of faith”). Moreover, the conclusion that these are subjective genitives “is based on nothing at all in the original itself.”

Considerations

1. It is apparent that the grammarians are convinced that the genitives here are subjective.¹² Thus to state that the NIV’s conclusion in this regard is “based on nothing at all in the original itself” is an exaggeration, as it is based on the nature of Greek syntax. The text under discussion presents a helpful example in this regard; just as we know from the Greek syntax that it is possible to translate the genitive *tou' kurivou hJmw'n jlhsou' Cristou'* which appears right after *th'" uJpomoh'" th'" ejlpivdo"* as “in the Lord Jesus Christ” rather than the more literal “of our Lord Jesus Christ,” so we can often conclude from the nature of the language itself that other genitives can be translated as subjective or objective.
2. To explicitly translate subjective genitives in this way, however, is something that mainline translations have not done so far. As there often is some degree of uncertainty and room for discussion on these issues, it is probably better not to do so however. Remarks of this nature are perhaps better left then to the exegete.

¹² F. Blass, F. and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 1974), 163; N. Turner, *Op.cit.*, p.211.

Response

Although they overreact to the issue and would have difficulty proving that the NIV is wrong about the nature of these genitives, R&H are correct that it would be better not to translate the subjective genitives of 1 Thess. 1:3 in the way that the NIV does. That would apply then also to similar subjective genitives in Romans 1:5; 16:26; 2 Thess. 1:11.

7.0 NEW DEFINITIONS?

Hebrews 3:14

NIV: ¹⁴ We have come to share in Christ if we hold firmly till the end the **confidence** we had at first.

NKJV: ¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our **confidence** steadfast to the end,

NA26: ¹⁴ mevtocoi gaVr tou' Cristou' gegovnamen, ejavnper thVn ajrchVn th" **uJpostavsew**" mevcrici tevlu" bebaivan katavscwmen,

Hebrews 11:1

NIV: ¹ Now faith is being **sure** of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

NKJV: ¹ Now faith is the **substance** of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

NA26: ¹ [Estin deV pivsti" ejlpizomevwn **uJpovstasi**", pragmavtwn e[legco" ouj blepomevwn.

The Charge

R&H take issue especially with the NIV change to Hebrews 11:1 "faith is being *sure* of what we hope for..." instead of "faith is the *substance*...". The NIV has opted for what has traditionally been an alternate meaning of the word **uJpovstasi**", but in the meantime, R&H point out, have not noted the change in the second edition of Bauer's lexicon which on the basis of new studies suggests that "sure, confidence, assurance" are not valid meanings of this word. Thus the NKJV's reading of Heb. 11:1 is right and the NIV's is wrong.

Considerations

1. Whether Bauer and the new studies are correct is not something that we can judge now. R&H obviously think they are.
2. R&H, while pointing out loud and long that the NIV of Heb.11:1 needs to be changed, only make a passing and quiet reference to the fact that the NKJV of Heb.3:14 needs to be changed then as well.

3. R&H completely fail to mention that, if these newer studies are correct, the NKJV's translation of 2 Cor. 9:4 and 2 Cor. 11:17 are in need of change as well. Apparently some of the NKJV translators also failed to read Bauer and the newer studies.
4. It is of interest to us that the NASB also translates uJpovstasi" in the sense of "assurance."
5. The problem here indicates that NKJV is in greater trouble than the NIV. For while the NIV can, if necessary, make changes to Hebrews and 2 Corinthians through its committee in the next edition, the NKJV has no committee and no plans for further edition.

Response

If R&H are right about the NIV's translation of Hebrews 11:1, their concerns apply equally well to the NKJV's translation of Hebrews 3:14 and 2 Cor.9:4 and 2 Cor. 11:17. The accusation has boomeranged.

8.0 DIFFERING HOLINESS?

Hebrews 10:10,14,29 in the NIV:

¹⁰ And by that will, we have been **made holy** through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹⁴ because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being **made holy**.

²⁹ How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that **sanctified him**, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:10, 14,29 in the NKJV:

¹⁰ By that will we have **been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

¹⁴ For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are **being sanctified**.

²⁹ Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he **was sanctified** a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?

Hebrews 10:10, 14, 29 in the NA26:

¹⁰ ejn w/ qelhvmati **hJgiasmevnoi** ejsmeVn diaV th"" prosfora"" tou' swvmato" jlhsou' Cristou' ejfavpax.

¹⁴ mia/ gaVr prosfora/ teteleivwken eij" toV dihnekeV" touV" **aJgiazomevnou**".

²⁹ povsw/ dokei'te ceivrono" ajxiwqhvsetai timwriva" oJ toVn uiJoVn tou' qeou' katapathvsa", kaiV toV aijma th"" diaqhvkx" koinoVn

hJghsavmeno" ejn w/ hJgiavsqh, kaiV toV pneu'ma th" cavrito" ejnubrivsa";

The Charge

R&H complain first of all about the fact that a similar participle construction in 10:10 and 10:14 are translated differently (“have been made holy,” “are being made holy”). “The reader is left to wonder whether we *have been* made holy or whether we *are being* made holy.” Furthermore, in 10:29 where the same verb is used, the NIV uses the word “sanctified” instead.

Considerations

1. It is hard not to be annoyed with the first concern since the NKJV again does the same thing, going from “have been sanctified” to “are being sanctified”? One might be led to ask indeed whether we have been sanctified or are being sanctified?
2. It is the context which chooses and justifies the English tenses here.
3. The use of the verb “sanctified” in verse 29 is justifiable since the person there is someone who has later turned to unbelief. It surely would cause the reader some problems if the NIV would also translate “made holy” here. In this difficult passage, the meaning of the word seems to change. By using a new word, the NIV (in contrast to the NKJ which uses the same words) at least points that out to the reader.
4. Many of the comments made by R&H here refer to the notes in the NIV Study Bible rather than the NIV. The difference is not always noted carefully.

Response

R&H’s complaint about “the woeful performance by the NIV” are unjustified here.

9.0 CHILD OF GOD OR NOT?

1 John 3:10

NIV: ¹⁰ This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a **child** of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.

NKJV: ¹⁰ In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

NA26: ¹⁰ ejn touvtw/ fanerav ejstin taV tevkna tou' qeou' kaiV taV tevkna tou' diabolou: pa''' oJ mhV poiw'n dikaiosuvnhn oujk e[stin **ejk tou' qeou'**, kaiV oJ mhV ajgapw'n toVn ajdelfoVn aujtou'.

The Charge

R&H complain that the italicized words immediately above are not actually in the Greek, but are supplied by the translators. They are alarmed at the “calamitous” doctrinal implications here: “The translation at least *permits* the deduction that if a person does something wrong or feels ill will toward another Christian he is not really saved!”

Considerations

1. It is unfortunate that the NIV chose to add these words as the English sentence would have been clear enough here without them.
2. Again R&H are either very alarmist or heretical themselves. Is this not the point of John: that the failure to do right or to love could mean one is not a child of God or is not saved? Even if you leave out the words “a child”, the first part of the sentence in either the NIV or the NKJ is saying exactly that! John is saying more than just that the behaviour of such a one “does have its source in God”, as R&H suggest. “To make the text say more than that is a serious error,” they say. But the text does say more than that. Even the NKJV text says: “they are not children of God”!

Response

While the addition of the words “a child” in 1 John 3:10 is unnecessary, it is not wrong in view of the rest of the verse. R&H are however quite wrong and unChristian in their allegations against the translators of the NIV.

10.0 “NOT TO SIN” OR “NOT TO CONTINUE IN SIN”?

1 John 5:18

NIV: ¹⁸ We know that anyone born of God **does not continue to sin**; the one who was born of God keeps him safe, and the evil one cannot harm him.

NKJV: ¹⁸ We know that whoever is born of God **does not sin**; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.

NA26: ¹⁸ Oi[damen o{ti pa''' oJ gegennhmevno" ejk tou' qeou' oujc **aJmartavnei**, ajll' oJ gennhqeiv" ejk tou' qeou' threi' aujtovn, kaiV oJ ponhrov" oujc a{ptetai aujtou'.

The Charge

R&H claim that it is wrong for the NIV to translate $\alpha\mu\alpha\rho\tau\alpha\nu\epsilon\iota$ with the words “*continue to sin*.” If they do that here they should do that with more, if not all, simple present verbs. While this has been the predominant understanding of this verse for centuries, three recent commentaries (Marshall, Brown, Smalley) have abandoned the ‘tense solution’ and taken an “absolute/ideal solution.”

Considerations

1. From a grammatical point of view it is hard to say that R&H are right and the NIV in error here. The present tense which is used in these cases “signifies action in progress, or state, in persistence,” and is sometimes called the “present of *duration*.”¹³ Hence even though translations have not always explicitly said what the NIV says, it has been implicit all along.
2. Given the predominance of the view, it is all the more difficult to say that the NIV is wrong here. If the same comments are made time and again to explain a verse, there understandably comes a time when translators rightly decide to incorporate them into the text.
3. The possibility of theological bias is there from more than one corner. While Reformed people may not object to the NIV’s translation on theological grounds, many with unScriptural ideas about sanctification, sin and perfectionism would have reasons to leave it out.

Response

The grammatical construction as well as the predominance of the view which understands the words “continue in” as a necessary part of the rendering of these texts, make the NIV translation acceptable.

11.0 CONCLUSIONS

It is regrettable that despite many good comments that Earl Radmacher and Zane C. Hodges have made regarding the New International Version, their strong bias for the New King James has caused them to make many unfair accusations and to level numerous exaggerated charges, often with a blind eye to similar difficulties in the King James or the New King James. This makes it difficult to accept

¹³ H.E. Dana and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, (Macmillan, 1957), pp. 182-3.

whatever good critical comments they do make. And it only increases our conviction that their ultimate claim that the NIV is to be rejected as a reliable translation is also wrong and extremely exaggerated. One wonders how easy it would be, using the same methods, to draw the same conclusion about the New King James Version. But such methods, lamentable in the field of politics, are even more so when they are transferred to the study of the Word of God.

Nevertheless, the study of this chapter of Radmacher and Hodges has drawn our attention to the need to re-examine at some point the NIV translation of Romans 3:25, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, and Hebrews 11:1 in order to make suggestions to the NIV Translation Center as to how these can be improved.

Appendix 9

**A Review of Robert Martin's Book,
*Accuracy of Translation
and the New International Version***

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

A book which has had some influence in our circles regarding Bible translation is that of Robert Martin.¹ Martin is very critical of the NIV. He indicates that the NIV is a product of liberal scholarship because “it has been heavily influenced by the dynamic equivalence philosophy of translation.”(12) If this conclusion were true, then the NIV could never be recommended for use in our churches.

In view of the fact that this book has had some influence and that it has brought serious charges against the NIV, it was thought that a paper ought to be devoted to reviewing this book.

2.0 MARTIN’S GENERAL CRITICISM OF THE NIV

Martin’s basic criterion of a translation is accuracy. He asks “whether the NIV is accurate enough (...) to warrant its becoming the standard version of the English speaking world.”(4) His criterion for accuracy is derived from the “formal equivalence” philosophy of translation. The formal equivalence translation “attempts to say ‘what’ the original text says by retaining ‘how’ it says it (as far as English grammar allows).”(8) He explains why he feels that the ‘how’ needs to be retained by quoting from James Price: “because the message is often in the structure as much as in the words.”(10) He also quotes Ian Murray: “as God’s word written, its form as well as its thought is inspired.”(15)

However, his understanding of this principle of translation reduces the work of translating along simplistic lines. He states, there are occasions when the differences between the biblical languages and English are such that the formal equivalence translator cannot preserve in translation the precise grammatical structure of the original. (9)

In other words, Martin believes that *only by exception* “accommodation must be made to the English idiom to the degree necessary for clear communication.”(9)

Martin has a peculiar understanding concerning the relation between Greek and English. Although he states that “no two languages are exactly identical, either in the meanings given to corresponding words

¹ *Accuracy of Translation and the New International Version: The Primary Criterion in Evaluating Bible Versions* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1989).

or in the ways such words are arranged in phrases and sentences”(9), yet he holds that as a rule Greek grammatical structure can be preserved in English translation.

But again, this is a simplistic view of translation. In a footnote (note 2, page 9), he cites one Greek grammatical structure that cannot be paralleled in English, but the fact is, very few Greek grammatical structure resemble English ones, and none of them are identical.² Anyone with some knowledge of two languages will know that the differences in grammatical structure are more complex than Martin suggests. This point is significant because it lies behind his approval of the formal equivalence method of translation and his repudiation of the dynamic equivalence method.

Two things need to be observed at this point. There are two schools of thought concerning accuracy. Some believe that accuracy is best preserved with literal (formal equivalence) translations, while others believe that an idiomatic translation (not necessarily a dynamic equivalent translation) is more accurate.³ Martin assumes that a more literal translation is more accurate without proving it. Such an assumption is not responsible in view of the discussions taking place today. The second thing that needs to be observed is that Martin’s exclusive concern for *accuracy* needs some qualification. Even the Synodical charge to this Committee recognizes the criteria for a translation suitable for our churches, are not only accuracy but also linguistic character. Bob Sheehan writes that the duty of all translators is “to give a precise account of God’s message to us in language that we can understand. Their duty to God requires precision; their duty to man requires comprehensibility.”⁴ In all his criticism, Martin demonstrates no appreciation for the concern of translators to produce an *understandable* text. If linguistic character is important in the evaluation of a translation, than Martin’s criticisms have limited overall value.

² The NIV “Translator’s Preface” contains a much more realistic perspective on the relationship between different languages: “Because thought patterns and syntax differ from language to language, faithful communication of the meaning of the writers of the Bible demands frequent modifications in sentence structure and constant regard for the contextual meanings of words.”

³ Compare for instance, Herbert M. Wolf, “When ‘Literal’ Is Not Accurate”, in *The NIV: The Making of a Contemporary Translation*, International Bible Society: Colorado Springs, 1991, 127-136; and John Beekman, “‘Literalism’ a Hindrance to Understanding” in *The Bible Translator*, 17(1966): 178-189.

⁴ *Which Version Now?*, Carey Publications: Hayward Heath, Sussex (no date), 20.

Before dealing with the text in practical situations, Martin criticizes the dynamic equivalence method of translation because, he says, it is based on a *dynamic view of inspiration*. He defines a dynamic view of inspiration thus: God inspired the thoughts of the biblical writers but left them to express those thoughts or ideas in their own words.(14) Over against this, Martin passionately argues that every word is inspired.

Judging by the expressions he uses, it appears that Martin holds to a mechanical view of inspiration. At one point he says, “the complexity of the formal equivalence translations is not the product of the translator but of the Spirit of God.”(21) To say that the style of the Bible belongs to the Holy Spirit is typical of one who hold to the mechanical view of Scriptures. This is perhaps why he so brazenly implies that the NIV is heretical in spite of the fact that its translators have clearly articulated their commitment to the authority and infallibility of Scripture.⁵

Martin writes, “The dynamic view of translation corresponds to the dynamic view of inspiration”(14), and again, “the general tendency has been to find dynamic equivalence translation associated with heterodox views of biblical inspiration and authority.”(15) Thus, the NIV, adjudged beforehand to be a dynamic equivalent translation⁶, holds to a heretical view of inspiration. Although this charge is not stated directly, it is hardly veiled.

3.0 MARTIN’S SEVEN CATEGORIES OF CRITICISM

⁵ The “Translators’ Preface” of the NIV reads, “the translators were united in their commitment to the authority and infallibility of the Bible as God’s Word in written form.” Compare what Richard Kevin Barnard writes in *God’s Word in our Language: The Story of the New International Version*, International Bible Society: Colorado Springs, 1989 -- he tells how the NIV was launched in 1956 primarily in protest against the liberal tendencies manifest in the RSV (p. 47-59). The following quotation bears testimony to the high view of Scripture held by the NIV translators: “‘The New International Version,’ says Paine, ‘was based on the idea that the Bible is inerrant. It is the Word of God. Very early in the venture it was said that those who collaborate on his project must be of that mind. They must regard the Bible as the inerrant Word of God.’”(page 57; Barnard writes more about the high view on Scripture of the NIV translators on pages 99-101).

⁶ Compare page 12 where, before he begins to examine the NIV, he states, “it is not accurate to say that the NIV contains ‘a minimum ... of outright dynamic equivalence.’ (...) Indeed, the NIV has more in common with the dynamic equivalence translations than with the formal equivalence translation.”

In chapter four and five, Martin examines individual texts to prove his theory that the NIV is a dynamic equivalent translation, and because of its adherence to a unbiblical view of inspiration, is inaccurate.⁷ He divides his criticism into seven categories. Many of his specific criticisms are justified, but again, many of them are not. However, our main concern will be to test whether the general statements he wishes to support with his selected text criticisms, are correct.

3.1 The elimination of complex grammatical structures

He begins by stating that the NIV eliminates complex grammatical structure. The premise here is rather silly. He feels that a translation should be complex because, he says, the Bible is complex. Anyone who tries to make it easier to read treats the Bible “as modern newspapers, gossip magazines, or pulp novels”(20). He feels that a translation should be hard to read, for, he writes, “the Bible was never meant to yield the fullness of its message to those who are only willing to expend the absolute minimum of effort necessary.”(20) Again: “I fear that much of the cry for a translation which requires little effort to understand is rooted in the itch of our age for instant gratification.”(21) This leads the reader to draw a rather odd conclusion: the more complex and convoluted the translation, the more biblical it is.⁸

Martin, however, misrepresents the nature of Scripture. It is not characterized by complex Hebrew and Greek structures. Beekman and Callow make the opposite point much more convincingly:

The apostles and others who wrote the New Testament (...) preached to be understood and they wrote to be understood. At least two of the NT writers explicitly say so. In 2 Corinthians 1:13 Paul says, “For we write you nothing but what you can read and *understand*”(RSV). He was rejecting the charge of duplicity. Luke also says in the preface to

⁷ Sheehan rightly observes that Martin’s argument is poorly formed. He states, “Before proceeding to demonstrate that there are dynamic equivalents in the NIV and without having proven that formal equivalence create greater accuracy, Dr. Martin prejudices the minds of his readers against dynamic equivalence.” This is from his article, “Criticism of the NIV”, *Reformation Today*, March-April 1990, 16.

⁸ Compare what Sheehan says in *Which Version Now?*, page 17: “Yet there are men who believe that obscurity honours God! (...) This is an old opinion. Those Roman Catholics who produced the Rheims-Douay Version in the sixteenth century excused the incomprehensible parts of their version by saying that faithfulness to the words used by the Holy Spirit required it! Today there are those who believe that a Bible that can be understood is suspect.”

his gospel that “it seemed good to me also, ... to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilis, that you may *know* the truth concerning the things of which you have been informed” (Luke 1:3, 4 RSV).⁹

A specific example which Martin raised is that the NIV makes long Greek sentences into shorter English ones;¹⁰ but Martin cannot be satisfied since in most cases each translation he refers to except for the ASV simplifies the Greek into shorter English sentences. It is simply impossible to translate without altering this peculiarity of Greek literature.

3.2 The addition of words in translation

⁹ John Beekman and John Callow, *Translating the Word of God*, Zondervan Publishing House: Grand Rapids, 1974, 40-41.

¹⁰ Martin’s desire to reproduce long sentence in translation is misguided. While not necessarily subscribing to what follows, some quotations will illustrate the opposite point of view. Nida says in *Bible Translating*, American Bible Society: New York, 1947, 18: “Greek is an exceptional language in the extreme length of certain sentences.” Since English style does not favour long sentences, we should then expect to break them up. He also says, “Any attempt to modify or distort radically the native structure in order to make it fit the text language can result only in misunderstanding” (p. 275). But sentences must not be broken up in an arbitrary way; “Sentences are only to be changed in accordance with the demands of the lexical, morphological and syntactic structure of the native language.” Beekman and Callow, in *Translating the Word of God* (op. cit.), note that one of the chief marks of a “literal” translation is the adherence to the sentence length of the source language. Like Nida in *Bible Translating*, Beekman and Callow observe that such lengthy sentences as we find in Paul’s letters are very rare in any other language (page 28). They write on page 40 that the Scriptures, “written as they were by native speakers, fell within the bounds of natural Hebrew, Aramaic and Koine Greek. The length of sentences; the ways in which they were connected; the use of words and their combinations the syntax; the morphology - all was natural.” They continue, “This characteristic [in particular, the use of natural sentence length] should also be found in a translation.” A literal translation is not faithful to this “naturalness” which was inherent to the original script. On page 42, Beekman and Callow carry this line further: “It follows from the above that there is a lack of dynamic fidelity if the translation is not natural in form or if it is not meaningful. A translation lacks in meaningfulness whenever it is unnecessarily ambiguous, or obscure, or communicates nothing at all. Many times such problems arise for the reader because the translator has translated literally, transferring the linguistic forms of the original to the receptor language.”

In the second category, Martin criticises the NIV for adding words in translation which are not in the original. He acknowledges that it is necessary for the translator to supply words which are missing in the original in order “to express the sense of the original”(22). But Martin feels that the reader should know which precise words have been added (for instance, by italicising them), presumably, because they do not have the same authority -- they are the translator’s words, not God’s.

But this is fallacious. The words which in the KJV are printed in italics are included in the Hebrew and Greek, or they should not be in the translation. Beekman and Callow give a better explanation of what the KJV did: “The use of italics in the KJV served just that purpose - to show an English reader what had to be expressed in English that was not overtly expressed in the original.” They go on to say, “The practice of using italics for this purpose was deliberately abandoned in the (English) Revised Version. The preface to the first edition of the Old Testament (1884, p. x) states, ‘that all such words, now printed in italics, as are plainly implied in the Hebrew and necessary in the English, be printed in common type.’”¹¹

3.3 The omission of words in translation

Martin writes next that the NIV omits words in translation, treating “conjunctions, particles, pronouns, articles, adjectives, adverbs, and even phrases as surplus verbiage.”(28) By contrast, he says, “It is rare in the work of translating for formal equivalence translators to omit words given by inspiration.”(28)

Although the omission of words occurs more often in the NIV than in the NKJV and NASB, yet the contrast is not as sharp as Martin would suggest. The KJV, NASB and NKJV also treat “words given by inspiration” as “surplus verbiage” because they are sensitive to the difference between the way that both languages communicate.¹² A brief look at any of the committee study papers on specific Scripture passages will bear this out. Translations which omit these words, do not remove something from the original text; they merely makes implicit in English what was explicit in the original text.

¹¹ Beekman and Callow, 46. For more on the use of italics, see the Committee Paper, *Notes on Style*.

¹² Sheehan writes, “It is impressive to attack the NIV for omitting ‘words given by inspiration’ but all translations do it”, and further, “He just fails to appreciate the complexity of the problem”, in, “Criticism of the NIV”, op. cit., 17,18.

3.4 The erosion of the Bible's technical terminology

In the fourth place, Martin claims that the NIV erodes the Bible's technical terminology. He lays the basis for this discussion with a series of questions: "Was the Bible written without technical terms? Are rare and difficult words lacking in the original?"(29) Martin assumes that the answer to these questions is "No", for he goes on to say, "Like any other discipline or field of study which has a unique or specialized message, the Christian faith has a technical vocabulary."(29) Granted, the Christian faith has technical vocabulary because the church has reflected on God's revelation, but the burden lies on Martin to prove that such terminology existed in the Bible. Many have criticised the massive theological dictionaries presently available because they tend to treat biblical words as static, fixed terms from which theological nuances can be elicited.

In this section, Martin's prejudice against the NIV becomes quite pronounced. He asks, "Why is *huiothesia* translated as 'adoptions as sons' at Romans 8:23 and 9:4 and as 'to be adopted as sons' at Ephesians 1:5, while no mention of adoption is found at Romans 8:15 ('sonship') or at Galatians 4:5 ('the full right of sons')?"(30) Martin would favour concordance, that is, that the same Greek word be rendered with the same English word. But even the translators of KJV eschewed the demand for concordance, announcing in the preface, "We have not tied ourselves to a uniformity of phrasing or to an identity of words." But Martin's standard for accuracy is quite unrealistic. In these five passages, there is also considerable variety within both the KJV and NKJV. In three places they have "the adoption"(Rm 8:15,23; 9:4); in Eph 1:5 KJV has "adoption of children" and NKJV "adoption as sons"(like Gal 5:4). Both have expanded but in different ways. The NIV at least in Rm 8:15 has added the footnote "Or *adoption*" in order to give the reader the full flavour of the Greek term, which makes the NIV, if anything, superior to the more "formal equivalence" translations here.

3.5 The levelling of cultural distinctives

The fifth criticism is again quite unconvincing. Martin states that "Dynamic equivalence translators, however, tend to engage in 'cultural levelling', that is, they tend to express biblical ideas in terms of modern customs, modern ways of thinking, and modern modes of

expression.”(38) He gives as example that the NIV has changed the expression “gird up the loins of your mind”(NKJV) to “prepare your minds for action”(I Pt 1:3).¹³ However, such “levelling of cultural distinctives” is practised by all translations in different ways. For instance, in Luke 12:37 the KJV and NKJV have, “sit down *to eat*.” The Greek verb, however, is a culturally distinctive one, (*anaklino*: to lay down) which derives from the practice of reclining upon a couch to enjoy a feast. The translators of the KJV and NKJV have deliberately decided to level this cultural distinctive presumably because they felt that an English reader will not understand the meaning of “to lay down to eat.”¹⁴ Contrary to what Martin says, it is the NIV which preserves the cultural distinctive in this passages: “recline at the table” (as does also the NASB).

3.6 The presentation of the interpretation of Scripture as Scripture

Martin saves most of his ink for the sixth criticism: that the NIV presents interpretation as translation. Again, his basic presuppositions need to be challenged. Martin ties all the NIV’s ‘interpretive’ renderings to theology. He states, “Interpretation, of course, involves the influence of theology”(41), and again, “Where the grammar is ambiguous (...) the translator must make as much a theological as a grammatical decision.”(42) He goes on to state, “the dynamic equivalence translator tends to be relatively unrestrained in his theologizing.”(42) In other words, Martin sees the NIV as secretly imposing some sort of supra-denominational theology upon the readers. In the 21 text examples which he selects, he attempt to raise the issue that the NIV adopted a certain *theological stance*¹⁵, however, it is quite unconvincing.

The encyclopedic place of theology (or better, “dogmatology”) is after the exegetical disciplines. Exegesis and hermeneutics must inform theology, and not vice versa. The translations which the NIV has offered are, by and large, not based on dogmatic principles but on

¹³ For an evaluation of this precise example, see the Committee Text Study on I Peter.

¹⁴ This is quite a far reaching policy since the KJV and NKJV have thus treated the text at Mt 8:11, 9:10, 14:19, 26:7,20, Mk 6:39, 14:18, 16:14, Lk 7:36,37, 9:15, 12:37, 13:29, 22:27, Jn 6:11.

¹⁵ For instance, example # 14 (Eph 4:9) and # 18 (1 Tm 1:16) are apparently “theological” translations.

exegetical ones. It is important to defuse Martin's highly charged context for the discussion on the NIV's alleged "interpretive translations."

Regarding the 21 specific texts which Martin selects for comment, some of them support his point that the NIV is being too interpretive. Our Committee often questioned a passage in the NIV as being too interpretive, but upon closer examination it was often discovered that the NIV had produced a text that was accurate yet idiomatic. On the basis of this experience, there are many of the texts which Martin selected which deserve closer examination.¹⁶ However, many of the texts he selects for criticism should be dismissed out of hand as being unwarranted.¹⁷ But on five instances, Martin is unfair, for while the NIV gives an idiomatic translation in the text, it provides a literal translation in the footnote.¹⁸ Martin feels that the translators should do the opposite: put the literal translation in the text and the idiomatic ("interpretive") expression in the footnote. Whatever Martin's opinion may be in this matter, he cannot maintain that when the NIV gives an idiomatic expression in the text and the literal translation in a footnote, that it "erode[s] the right of the people of God to exercise private judgment in interpreting the Scriptures." (46)

3.7 The paraphrasing of the Biblical text

In the last point, that the NIV paraphrases the biblical text, Martin makes his most direct attempt to place the NIV in the same camp as the *Good News Bible* and the *Living Bible*, which are self-proclaimed paraphrases. Martin disputes the NIV's claim that there is only a minimum of actual paraphrase. But when the NIV claims to use a *minimum* of paraphrase, it does not mean, as Martin says, "the least amount attainable" (63), but whatever was necessary "to attain a high degree of faithfulness in putting into clear and idiomatic English what the Hebrew and Greek texts say. Whatever literary distinction the NIV has is the result of the persistence with which this course was pursued."¹⁹

¹⁶ The following text examples merit closer examination before Martin's judgment should be either accepted or rejected: # 1 (Mt 6:22), 2 (Jn 1:16), 3 (Jn 6:27), 4 (Jn 14:30), 5 (Ac 17:34), 9 (1 Cor 6:18), 11 (1 Cor 7:4), 13 (Gal 4:5), 14 (Eph 4:9), 18 (1 Tm 1:16) and 19 (Philemon 6).

¹⁷ Even a cursory examination will indicate that the NIV does not deserve to be censured for its rendering in the following examples: # 12 (1 Cor 7:35), 15 (Col 1:25), 16 (Col 3:5), and 20 (Heb 12:4).

¹⁸ # 6 (Rm 1:17), 7 (Rm 8:3), 8 (Rm 8:28), 10 (1 Cor 7:1) and 17 (1 Th 4:4).

¹⁹ *The Story of the New International Version*, 13.

4.0 CONCLUSION

We must conclude that Martin is not very helpful in assessing the NIV because his understanding of the process of translation is oversimplified and his criterion for a good translation is unbalanced. As for his seven points of criticism, they are either questionable as categories, or if they have validity, they either testify equally against other translations as against the NIV, or the charge they contain cannot be substantiated against the NIV. Martin, however, has one concern which may be substantiated, and that is that the NIV sometimes presents a translation which is unnecessarily interpretive. This concern has, from the beginning, held the attention of our committee and is reflected in our text studies.

For Whom is the New King James Version?

The NKJV has been produced with a specific target group in mind. In the promotional literature for the NKJV, one will read several times that the KJV remains the most widely read version of the Scriptures in the English speaking world.¹ Of late, this claim can no longer be made, but at the outset of the NKJV project, this was certainly the case.

Despite the fact that many translations sought to be the successor to the King James legacy, beginning with the English Revised Version in 1881/85, the American Standard Version 1901, the Revised Standard Version in 1946/52 and finally the New American Standard Bible in 1963/71, the fact is, none succeeded. Most christians still preferred the old KJV. By “old KJV” is not meant the version as it was originally published in 1611, but the revision of 1769.

Why did people stick to this version instead of accepting any of the newer versions after 1769? The reason seems to be that beginning with the English Revised Version in 1881 a different text base for the New Testament was used based on the advances in the field of Textual Criticism, especially as they had been published by Westcott and Hort. The English Revised Version is exceptional since according to its rules for revision, they were to make as few alterations as possible, and those which were accepted were “to be in the style of the King James Versions; no change was to be made unless the evidence was ‘decidedly prepondering’.”² However, the ASV, RSV and NASB departed from the text of the KJV much more freely as the translators felt the original text demanded and as the editors felt the changing diction and syntax of the English language required.

Many people who cherished the old KJV were offended at the changes which were introduced to the text. Consequently, they clung to their beloved King James. The *New King James Version* wishes to avoid causing offense as much as possible. It attempts to be more sensitive to the attachment which people still today have to the KJV. It seeks, above all, to lay claim to the legacy of the KJV which none have successfully been able to do since the revision of 1769.

¹ Walter A. Elwell states that “34.8 percent of American homes still use the KJV as the primary Bible” *Christianity Today*, November 2, 1979, p 48 [1481].

² *A Concise History of the English Bible*, The American Bible Society: New York (n.d.), 32-33.

The manner in which the NKJV attempts to do this can be gathered from a few different sources. In a promotional brochure from Thomas Nelson Publishers, called *Statement of Purpose*, one learns about the NKJV that “the purpose of this project is to preserve the original intended purity of the King James Version.” It identifies the NKJV as “this edition of the King James Version.” Further,

This edition shall not add to, nor take from, nor alter the communication that was the intent of the original translators [of the King James Version]. (...) This edition shall not corrupt nor diminish the original translation ... so that a reader of this edition may follow without confusion a reading of the original edition from the pulpit.

This last quotation is important for understanding whom the NKJV is especially intended for. It is expressly intended to claim the allegiance of those who cling to the 1769 KJV, such as the 1881 and subsequent versions have failed to do.

In his book, *The New King James Version: in the Great Tradition*, Arthur Farstad, who served as executive editor of the New King James Version, passes on the guidelines for the editors and translators. It begins,

The purpose of this project is to produce an updated English version that follows the sentence structure of the 1611 Authorized Version as closely as possible. (...) The intention is not to take from or alter the basic communication of the 1611 edition but to transfer the Elizabethan word forms into twentieth-century English. The traditional texts of the Greek and Hebrew will be used rather than modern critical texts based on the Westcott and Hort theory.³

Then Farstad supplies a 16 point set of guidelines from which a few relevant points are here quoted:

3. Correct all departures from the Textus Receptus.
4. Words that have changed their meaning since 1611 should be replaced by their modern equivalents.
5. Archaic idioms should be replaced by modern equivalents.
8. Change all Elizabethan pronouns, verb forms and other archaic words to their current equivalent.
9. Attempt to keep King James word order. However, when comprehension or readability is affected transpose or revise sentence structure.⁴

It is interesting to note that in the first edition of the NKJV - NT in 1979, there were no italics, but “the King James tradition of italicizing supplied words was restored by popular demand of the readers.”⁵

³ *The New King James Version: In the Great Tradition*,² Thomas Nelson Publishers: Nashville, 1993, 33.

⁴ *Ibid*, 34.

Most readers of the KJV will admit that the language needs to be updated. In this regard, the NKJV has gone very far, updating all verb forms, even the second person singular form in those texts which address God (there is no longer a separate verbal form in addressing God, with “thee” and “thou”).

Of special interest is that the NKJV *corrects* all departures from the Textus Receptus. This has reference only to the NT since the Old Testament is based on the Hebrew Masoretic Text and this has remained relatively unchanged since the 1600’s (Dead Seas Scrolls notwithstanding). But the position of the NKJV in regard to the NT is extraordinary. What has become known as the Textus Receptus was published in 1624/33. The KJV was published in 1611 and therefore used several NT Greek texts which were the basis for the Textus Receptus, but not identical to it (compare the third guideline for the NKJV translators and editors, quoted above). The publisher of the NKJV wanted to have an objective standard for the NT text. Since an objective text did not yet fully exist at the time which the KJV was published, and since the Textus Receptus is the closest to the underlying text to the KJV New Testament, it forms the basis for the NKJV. This is especially interesting since Farstad himself would prefer what is called the Majority Text, however, the Majority Text would bring the NKJV farther away from the KJV, therefore, the Textus Receptus was selected. Farstad justifies this compromise by asserting that the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text are virtually identical; however, this is a compromise, one which is very difficult to defend.⁶

It is clear that the controlling motivation for producing the NKJV was to serve those who still adhere to the KJV. Since there are many who, despite the presence of a multitude of other translations, still use the KJV in worship services, the NKJV has a valid place in the market today.

⁵ Ibid, 35.

⁶ Farstad notes that the Textus Receptus and the Majority Text are different especially in the Book of Revelation, *ibid*, 109. Farstad writes in typical fashion, “In three fine schools I strongly taught the critical theory, and only after graduating from seminary did I come to study textual criticism for myself. The culmination of all this was my conversion to the majority text position and later to being asked to co-edit a Greek New Testament”, *ibid*, 117 n 15. Arthur L. Farstad co-edited with Zane C. Hodges *The Greek New Testament according to the Majority Text* (Thomas Nelson, 1982). Dr. J. van Bruggen served as consulting editor along with Alfred Martin, Wilbur N. Pickering, and Harry A. Sturz.

But for several reasons, it is unsuited to become the translation of the Canadian Reformed Churches.

First, we have no special attachment to the KJV. For more than 20 years, most of our churches have not been using the KJV so that not only is there a loss of attachment to the KJV, but there is now a whole generation which is unacquainted with it.

Secondly the NKJV is not a fresh translation but a revision. There are several negative consequences of this. The first consequence is that on occasion, the NKJV will follow the KJV rather than the original text. D.M. Howard observes, "Incredibly, the old KJV can occasionally take precedence over the MT and DSS (at Isa 10:16 [cf. v 33!] and 38:14, for example)."⁷ A second consequence is that the new version is too limited in the extent of its changes. The common complaint about the NKJV is that it did not go far enough; it maintained antiquated terms which the translators and editors would surely have removed or changed if it had not been for their devotion to the KJV. After observing that "antiquated expressions are left intact, S.K. Soderlund comments that "This translation enterprise is inspired by a degree of respect of the original translation of 1611 which effectively limits the range of revision possibilities."⁸ Hebert F. Peacock says, "This is not a modern translation. To quote the King James Version, 'The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau'(Gen. 27.22)."⁹ Peacock is quite correct in stating that this is not a modern translation, for on account of the translators' and editors' deference to the KJV, the NKJV does not fully enter the category of a modern translation.

There are some who go too far in their criticisms. W.W. Wessel criticises the goals of the NKJV, saying,

The KJV was truly a great achievement - probably the greatest translation the English language will ever see. But it is well over 350 years old. It is not possible to make it into an adequate translation for our time without destroying its unique characteristics. So why not allow it to die an honourable death? It served its day well.¹⁰

⁷ David M. Howard in *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies*, vol. 26 no. 3 (September 1983), 370. "MT" stands for Masoretic Text and "DSS" stands for Dead Sea Scrolls.

⁸ *Crux*, vol. 16, no. 2 (June 1980), 31.

⁹ *Bible Translator*, vol. 31 no. 3 (July 1980), 339.

¹⁰ *Journal of Evangelical Theological Studies* 23, 1980, 348.

The NKJV is designed for those who want the KJV to continue to serve the churches, but in an updated edition; therefore, what Wessel says is not for us to judge. That is up to those who adhere to the KJV.

The third reason why this is not suited for our churches is that the text which underlies the NKJV New Testament, although reasonable for the audience which Thomas Nelson has, is not suitable for us. While we may agree that both the Majority Text and the Eclectic Text are reliable, nobody will argue that we should adhere to the Textus Receptus, particularly with its problems in the Book of Revelation and in other significant passages in the New Testament.

While we may respect the goals of the NKJV (with some reservation concerning the choice of NT text), we would not recommend this translation for our churches. Since the King James Version is not the primary Bible translation in our homes, churches or schools, we need a more thorough-going modern translation than the New King James Version.

**A COMPARISON
OF TRANSLATIONS OF
2 SAMUEL 5 AND 6**

Chapter 5

Verse 1

כָּל־שִׁבְטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־דָּוִד חִבְרוֹנָה וַיֹּאמְרוּ לְאִמֵּר הֲנִנוּ עֲצָמָי
וּבִשְׂרָרִי אֲנַחְנוּ:

NASB
Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Behold we are your bone and your flesh."

NIV
All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood."

NKJV
All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh."

COMMENT:

1. NIV has given a dynamic equivalent by rendering עֲצָמָי וּבִשְׂרָרִי with "flesh and blood." The NASB and NKJV retain the original Hebrew words. This is a complex matter. How do translations render the Hebrew words for various body parts? If "flesh and blood" has the same meaning as "bone and flesh," does that make the NIV a good or even a better translation? The NT has the expression "flesh and blood" seven times (Mt 16:17, Jn 6:54,56, I Co 11:27, 15:50, Eph 6:12, Heb 2:14). The LXX resisted the temptation to use the expression more familiar to the Greek ear (it has ὀστέα σου καὶ σάρκα σου). It appears, that the NIV chooses an expression more familiar to the English ear but was motivated to do so out of the desire to harmonize the language of the OT text with the NT text — a motivation which proves very strong in many translation choices.

Verse 2

וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְנָגִיד עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
and you will be a ruler over Israel	and you will become their ruler	and be ruler over Israel

COMMENT:

1. NASB in a wooden fashion includes the word “a”;
2. NIV’s “will become” is a good rendering since לְ תִהְיֶה can be rendered “to become” (KB 4.e.)
3. NIV has changed “ruler over Israel” to “their ruler.” This change is disturbing since the NIV decided to make a harmless alteration to the words of the text in order to make a minor stylistic improvement.
4. NKJV does not include the pronoun.

Verse 3

וַיָּבֹאוּ כָּל־זִקְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֶל־הַמֶּלֶךְ חִבְרוֹנָה וַיַּכְרֹת לָהֶם הַמֶּלֶךְ
דָּוִד בְּרִית

NASB	NIV	NKJV
So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them	When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them	Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them

COMMENT:

1. NASB’s “So” and the NIV’s “When” is good. NKJV’s “Therefore” is too strong.
2. NIV has transposed the name “David” from the second part of the sentence to the first part for stylistic reasons (cf. vs 2 comment 3).
3. NIV rendering of בְּרִית by “compact” deserves our attention. All three places where the word בְּרִית is translated “compact” fall within a political context (2 Sm 3:21, here and 1 Chron 11:3). We touch here on the topic of concordance. It is interesting to notice that the translators of the KJV decided not to call Joshua’s agreement with the Gideonites a “covenant” but a “league” (5 times - in Joshua 9; there the NIV translates “treaty”). A study of Genesis shows that of the 27 times that

בְּרִית occurs, it is translated “covenant” 25 times. They are consistently religious contexts but in non-religious contexts, it is translated with different words (as does the KJV in Genesis).

Verse 8

כָּל־מַכָּה יְבֹסִי וַיִּגַע בְּצַנּוֹר

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Whoever would strike the Jebusites, let him reach [them] through the water tunnel.	Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach [them]	Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites...

COMMENT:

1. NIV is commended for a smooth translation of a difficult passage, while the NASB unimaginatively applies dictionary meanings of Hebrew verbs (one would need a very long arm to accomplish the action suggested by the words, “let him reach through the water shaft”);
2. NIV best preserves the sense of נָגַע, while the NKJV has rendered a non-literal translation.
3. NIV footnote “use scaling hooks” reflects good scholarship (cf. KB צַנּוֹר);
4. NKJV makes amendments to the text (by adding, “he shall be chief and captain”) without any external evidence in order to harmonize this passage with 1 Chronicles 11:6. It does, however, note this fact in a footnote. NKJV follows the KJV.
5. A better translation: “let him reach the lame and the blind by way of the water shaft.”

Verse 10

וַיְהִי הָאֱלֹהִי צְבָאוֹת

NASB	NIV	NKJV
the LORD God of Hosts	the LORD God Almighty	the LORD God of hosts

COMMENT:

1. Unlike the NASB and the NIV the NKJV does not regard the term **צְבָאוֹת** as part of God's proper name;
2. The NIV explains its choice of "Almighty" in the "Translator's Preface" to the NIV (about two thirds of the way into the preface): "for most readers today, the phrases 'the LORD of hosts' and 'God of hosts' have little meaning." In explaining their translation, the Preface reads, "these renderings convey the sense of the Hebrew, namely, 'he who is sovereign over all the "hosts" (powers) in heaven and on earth.'" This position is further explained by Kenneth L. Barker in the essay, "YHWH Sabaoth: 'The LORD Almighty'" in *The NIV: the Making of a Modern Translation*, K.L. Barker (ed.) (International Bible Society, Colorado: 1991). There the significant point is made that "the Greek term *pantokrator* is commonly used in the Septuagint as the semantic equivalent of Sabaoth (and of Shaddai)." It appears, however, that the NIV is not adverse to using the word "hosts" (eleven times). A motive that may lie behind this choice is the desire for concordance between the OT and the NT (where, as Barker carefully documents in nine instances, we might expect "Lord/God of Hosts," we always have "Lord/God Almighty"). Barker's point in citing these nine instances, is to show that if this is what the NT writers did, then surely, modern Bible translators may do so as well.

Verse 13

וַיִּקַּח דָּוִד עוֹד פְּלִגְשִׁים וְנָשִׁים מִירוּשָׁלַם אַחֲרַי בְּאוֹ מִחֶבְרוֹן

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Meanwhile, David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem after he left Hebron	After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem	And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem

COMMENT:

1. NIV does two questionable things which neither NASB nor NKJV does: first it reverses the Hebrew sentence structure and secondly it reads **בִּירוּשָׁלַם** for **מִירוּשָׁלַם** probably to harmonize with 1 Chronicles 14:5 which reads **בִּירוּשָׁלַם** (compare the Septuagint: $\xi\xi$ Ιερουσαλημ).

Verse 14

וְאֵלֶּה שְׁמוֹת הַיְלָדִים לֹו בִירוּשָׁלַם

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Now these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem	These are the name of the children born to him there	Now these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem

COMMENT:

1. Unlike the NASB and the NKJV, the NIV reads שֵׁם for בִירוּשָׁלַם for stylistic reasons.

Verse 17

וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ פְּלִשְׁתִּים כִּי־מָשַׁח אֶת־דָּוִד לְמֶלֶךְ עַל־יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיַּעֲלוּ כָל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים

NASB	NIV	NKJV
When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to...	When the Philistines had heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to...	Now, when the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel, all the Philistines went up to...

COMMENT:

1. The NIV reads מָשַׁח as a passive (“David *had been anointed* king”) because an impersonal third person, plural active form often should be translated as though it were a passive form.
2. The NIV translation “they went up *in full force*” as opposed to “all the Philistines went up” is a fine translation; in this way, it is no longer necessary to repeat the second appearance of the word “Philistine.”

Verse 18

וּפְּלִשְׁתִּים בָּאוּ וַיִּנְטְשׁוּ בְעַמְקֵי רְפָאִים:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Now the Philistines came out and spread	Now the Philistines had come and spread out in	The Philistines also went and deployed

themselves out in the valley of Rephaim; the Valley of Rephaim; themselves in the Valley of Rephaim.

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and NIV give a good sense to the Niphal of נָטַשׁ while the NKJV chooses a technical military English term, “deploy.” This is too restrictive since the Philistines were not necessarily performing military manoeuvres but may simply be pillaging the country side;
2. The NIV has rendered קָאֵר as a pluperfect (cf R.J. Williams, *Hebrew Syntax* 162.3). This is superior to the simple past tense as in the NASB and NKJV.

Verse 19

וַיִּשְׂאֵל דָּוִד בַּיהוָה לֵאמֹר הֲאֵעֲלֶה אֶל־פְּלִשְׁתִּים הַחֲתָנִים בְּיָדִי

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Then David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt Thou give them into my hand?”	so David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?”	So David inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?”

COMMENT:

1. Both the NASB and NKJV render אֶל־עֲלֶה literally, “go up against,” while the NIV renders it, “go and attack.” The NIV has rendered the correct sense in a different form. This is above reproach because if we will accept that two Hebrew words can be rendered by one English one (and we certainly do), then surely, we can also accept that one Hebrew verb is translated by two English ones.
2. The NIV adequately conveys the Hebrew sense but it does not give a word for word translation as the NASB and NKJV does. It has taken the verb נָתַן (literally: “to give”) as “to hand over,” while בְּיָדִי (literally: “into my hand”) is rendered, “to me.”

Verse 21

וַיַּעֲזְבוּ־שָׁם אֶת־עֲצֵבֵיהֶם

NASB	NIV	NKJV
And they abandoned their idols there	The Philistines abandoned their idols there	And they left their images there

COMMENT:

1. The NIV thought it necessary to add that the *Philistines* abandoned these images instead of the undetermined “they.” Although there can be little question about the correctness of this interpretation, yet it evinces the fact that NIV more easily renders translations from a purely interpretive view than the NASB or the NKJV.

Verse 23

לֹא תֵעָלֶה הַסֵּב אֶל־אֲחֵרֵיהֶם וּבָאתָ לָהֶם מִמּוֹל בְּכָאִים:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
You shall not go <i>directly</i> up; circle around behind them and come at them in front of the balsam trees.	Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees.	You shall not go up; circle around behind them, and come upon them in front of the mulberry trees.

COMMENT:

1. The NKJV alone sticks to the very words, “You shall not go up”; this is significant in relation to the NASB since it evinces the fact that the NASB will supply words in the translation which are not strictly demanded by the Hebrew text.
2. With respect to the Hebrew phrase וּבָאתָ לָהֶם, the NASB and NKJV try to retain the strict English-Hebrew word correspondence, but the result is very wooden. Here it is best to use different word as the NIV: “attack them.” The fact needs to be borne in mind that there are very few technical terms in the Hebrew language due to its relatively small vocabulary; therefore, it is to be expected that in certain contexts, non-technical Hebrew words will be translated with technical English ones.
3. As to בְּכָאִים no one is sure what species of tree this is, thus the NKJV of course follows the KJV with “mulberry trees.”

Verse 24

אִז תִּחַרְצַן כִּי אִז יֵצֵא יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ לְהַכּוֹת בְּמַחֲנֶה פְּלִשְׁתִּים:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
then you shall act promptly, for then the LORD will have gone out before you to strike the army of the Philistines.	move quickly, because that will mean the LORD has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.	then you shall advance quickly. For then the LORD will go out before you to strike the camp of the Philistines.

COMMENT:

1. It is strange that the NKJV should divide this passage into two sentences.
2. We have a wooden application of grammatical rules by the NASB: the verb אֲצַדֵּךְ is in the perfect aspect, but the context indicates that it is future, hence the unwieldy future perfect “will have gone out.” The NIV renders the future perfect much more naturally. The NKJV does not seem to reckon at all with the aspect of this verb.

Verse 25

וַיִּךְ אֶחָד־פְּלִשְׁתִּים מִגִּבְעָה עַד־בֵּאֵר גִּזְרִי:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
and struck down the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.	and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.	and he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer.

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and NKJV are not shaken from the MT. NIV however provides this note: “*Septuagint (see also 1 Chron. 14:16); Hebrew ‘Geba.’*” Geographical considerations make this emendation very plausible, and commentators suggest that the MT has a scribal error here.
2. The word בֵּאֵר is a Qal infinitive with the 2nd person singular pronominal suffix of בּוֹאֵ. This is how the KJV understood this form, and translated it, “until thou come to Gazer.” Each translation above chooses a non-literal rendering due to style. Something is lost in all three translations.

Chapter 6

Verse 1

וַיִּסַּף עוֹד דָּוִד אֶת־כָּל־בְּחֹר בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁלֹשִׁים אֲלָף:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Now David again gathered all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.	David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all.	Again David gathered all the choice men of Israel, thirty thousand.

COMMENT:

1. While the NASB and NKJV end the sentence limply, the solution of the NIV, although sounding better, is not accurate. The NIV tells us that 30,000 men were gathered. What the MT tells us (that *all* the chosen men were gathered) is reflected in NASB and NKJV.

Verse 2

וַיָּקָם דָּוִד וְכָל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ מִבְּעֵלֵי יְהוּדָה לְהַעֲלוֹת מִשָּׁם אֶת אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא שֵׁם שָׁם יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת יֹשֵׁב הַכְּרֻבִים עָלָיו:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
And David arose and went with all the people who were with him to Baale-Judah, to bring up from there the ark of God which is called by the Name, the very name of the LORD of hosts who is enthroned above the cherubim.	He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.	And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim.

COMMENT:

1. The NIV has summed up the phrase וַיָּקָם דָּוִד with “he set out.” This is accurate and stylistically pleasing. However, the NIV choice of “and all his men” for וְכָל־הָעָם is non-literal.

2. The words **בְּעֵלֵי יְהוָה** are best rendered as in NASB or NKJV. The NIV explains why it chooses a variant form not strictly as in the text in a footnote which reads, “That is, Kiriath Jearim; Hebrew *Baale Judah*, a variant of *Baalath of Judah*.” This footnote is based on 1 Chronicles 13:6 “And David and all Israel went up to Baalah, that is, to Kiriath-jearim which belongs to Judah...” (cf. BHS text note on 2Sm6:2; 2^a Q alit cf 1 Ch 13,6).
3. Regarding the words **שֵׁם שֵׁם** placed side by side, all three translations resist the temptation to regard this as an instance of dittography, or to alter it to an easier reading as in the BHS text note (‘mlt Mss **שֵׁם** cf S). For fluent treatment, the NIV is best. The NKJV is quite archaic and almost senseless. The NASB is much better in this regard; with the word, “very” in the phrase, “by the very name of the LORD,” it brings out the emphasis of the Hebrew text.
4. Note again NIV’s treatment of God’s proper name, **יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת** (cf. 5:10).
5. Regarding the phrase, **יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִים עָלָיו**, the NASB and NKJV both follow the KJV by mistakenly printing “above” (NASB) and “between” (NKJV) in italics as though they were supplying a word that was absent from the Hebrew text. It appears, however that they are rendering **עָלָיו** by “above” (NASB) and “between” (NKJV), unless the NASB and NKJV were here ignoring certain words in the text. However, Hebrew grammar does not recommend the sense of “between” as the NKJV has it. If the NASB is in fact translating **עָלָיו** by “above,” then it is grammatically more accurate. The NIV’s approach is, however, superior to both. It has taken the word **עָלָיו** as a subordinate clause to **הַכְּרֻבִים יָשָׁב**. **יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִים** appears seven times in the Hebrew Bible (according to Even-Shoshan) and never does it contain the preposition **עַל**. The only place where this phrase is connected to **עַל** is in Ezekiel 10:18 where we find **וַיַּעֲמֵד עַל-הַכְּרֻבִים** (and it [the glory of Yahweh] stood above the cherubim). Noteworthy is that in this chapter we find several occurrences of the expression “between the cherubim” (NIV “among the cherubim”) for **בֵּינֹתָ הַכְּרֻבִים**. The NIV and NKJV translate **יָשָׁב הַכְּרֻבִים** consistently as “between the cherubim” and the NASB translates it consistently as “above the cherubim.” But the word **עָלָיו** is taken by the NIV to mean “on it,” i.e., on the ark, and therefore supplies the noun thus, “that are on the ark.”

Verse 4

וַיִּשְׂאוּהוּ מִבַּיִת אַבִּינָדָב אֲשֶׁר בְּגִבְעָה עִם אֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹהִים

NASB	NIV	NKJV
So they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill;	with the ark of God on it,	And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God;

COMMENT:

1. The NASB translation is the best.
2. NKJV overemphasises the prefix מ with “out of the house.”
3. The NIV note d 3,4 reads thus: “Dead Sea Scrolls and some septuagint manuscripts; Hebrew *cart* ‘and they brought it with the ark of God from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill.’” To regard these words as a homoeoteleuton has much to recommend itself, since these words add virtually nothing to the narrative and in fact repeat what was said in verse 3. But the NIV footnote points to the external evidence in the Dead Sea Scrolls and some Septuagint manuscripts (for instance, Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia notes that Origen’s Septuagint regards this as a homoeoteleuton).

Verse 5

וַדָּוִד וְכָל־בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל מְשַׁחֲקִים לְפָנָי יְהוָה בְּכָל עֲצֵי בְרוֹשִׁים

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Meanwhile, David and all the house of Israel were celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of fir wood,	David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with songs	Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood,

COMMENT:

1. The meaning of שחק is not directly connected to the idea of making music, hence the NKJV’s translation (“played music”) is puzzling (but cf

KJV: “Israel played before the LORD”). The NASB and the NIV show better understanding of Hebrew vocabulary at this point.

2. The NASB and NKJV have chosen to amend the text to make sense of the difficult text in MT. Literally, the Hebrew reads, “[they] were celebrating before Yahweh with all (kinds of) wood of fir/juniper.” The NASB and NKJV have added, “all kinds of *instruments* of fir wood.” The NIV has chosen instead to follow the Septuagint and the parallel passage in Chronicles (which reads 1 Chronicles 13:8 **עֲזוּ וּבְשִׁירִים בְּכֵל**) and to give the massoretic text in the footnote thus: “^e 5 See Septuagint and 1 Chronicles 13:8; Hebrew *celebrating before the LORD with all kinds of instruments made of pine.*” Here the NIV shows its tendency to harmonize Samuel with Chronicles when the Samuel text shows signs of textual corruption.

Verse 13

וַיְהִי כִּי צָעְדוּ נֹשְׂאֵי

NASB	NIV	NKJV
And so it was, that when the bearers of...	When those who were carrying...	And so it was, when those bearing...

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and NKJV wish to retain the peculiar marks of Hebrew narrative. It makes better sense to not encumber the text by including thing which add nothing to the sense of the passage in the English language.

Verse 16

וַתְּהִי אָרֶן יְהוָה בָּא עִיר דָּוִד

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Then it happened as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David	As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David	Now as the ark of the LORD came into the City of David,

COMMENT:

1. Here the NASB's emphasis on רָחַץ is unjustified. In English, the expression, "Then it happened," brings us from common narrative to the key point in a passage. But when one examines the usage of רָחַץ he will soon discover that this is not how it is used. The NIV and NKJV properly do not translate it.

Verse 17

וּשְׁלָמִים

NASB
peace offerings

NIV
fellowship offerings

NKJV
peace offerings

COMMENT:

1. The NIV's translation breaks from tradition, however, it always supplies the note, "Traditionally *peace offerings*." It is difficult to judge which is better. G. Wenham reflects on three terms (peace, shared or fellowship offering) and says, "This is simply a guess based on the nature of the party after the sacrifice, when the worshipper and his friends ate the meat together." He leans toward the term "peace offering," stating that Hebrew "shalom" is more than the absence of war. It "means health, prosperity and peace with God, i.e., salvation." (*Leviticus*, NICOT, 76-77)

CONCLUSIONS**1. MAJOR DARTS**

NASB: On two instances, the NASB is quite silly: 5:8 and 6:16.

NIV: 5:13 harmonizes with Chronicles without external evidence;
6:1 sacrifices accuracy for style.

NKJV: 5:8 harmonizes with Chronicles without external evidence;
6:2 is archaic and nearly senseless.

2. INTERMEDIATE DARTS

NIV: 6:2 harmonizes with Chronicles with marginal external evidence.

NKJV: 5:18 is interpretive.

3. MINOR DARTS

NASB: 5:2 use of indefinite article in a wooden manner; 5:24 wooden application of grammatical rules; 6:2 makes poor use of preposition; 6:13 unnecessarily retains the Hebrew narrative style.

NIV: 5:2 changes “ruler over Israel” to “their ruler”; 5:14 makes a questionable stylistic change; 5:12 is a harmless example of interpretive translation.

NKJV: 5:3 “therefore” is too strong; 5:24 makes one Hebrew sentence into two for no apparent reason; 6:2 poor use of a preposition; 6:4 too strong use of a preposition; 6:13 unnecessarily retains the Hebrew narrative style.

4. LAURELS

NASB: Renders the best translation in 6:4 and a good translation at 5:3, 6:2 and 6:5.

NIV: Renders the best translation in 5:2,8,17,18,23,24; 6:2,13 and a good translation at 5:3, 6:2 and 6:5. NIV deserves special mention for skilfully handling difficulties in the Masoretic Text at 5:8 and 6:2.

NKJV: Renders the best translation in 5:23a.

5. NOTEWORTHY TRANSLATIONS WHICH WE DO NOT CENSURE

NIV: 5:3 transposes “David” from the second part of the verse to the first; 5:11 the Hebrew expression “bone and flesh” is given the dynamic equivalent “flesh and blood”; 5:10 “of Hosts” is rendered “Almighty”; 5:17 “in full force” accurately (though not literally) translates the text; 5:19 the expressions “go and attack” and “hand them over to me” accurately (though not literally) translate the text; 5:25 the change of “Geba” to “Gibeon” is reasonable; 6:4 may indeed contain a homeoteleuton; 6:5 a reasonable harmonization with Chronicles; 6:17 the traditional translation is changed.

NKJV: 5:2 does not include a pronoun; 5:8 a non-literal translation.

A COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF PSALM 127

Verse 1

Interesting that NIV translates שׁוֹמְרִים as a plural: “watchmen”, apparently attempting to match the plurals in the context for stylistic reasons.

Verse 2

לֶחֶם הַעֲצָבִים

RSV: “bread of anxious toil,” NKJV “bread of sorrows,” NASB “bread of painful labors,” NIV “toiling for food to eat.”

While other translations add element of anxiety, pain, sorrow, the fact that עֲצָב does not necessarily include these elements in seen in Proverbs 5:10; 14:23 where these translations do not bring them in either. NIV captures the sense when it translates it with “toil.” It’s unfortunate, though not necessarily wrong, that the concept of “bread of...” is left out and replaced with the more general “food.”

כֵּן יִתֵּן לְיָדוֹ שְׁנָא

RSV, NIV and NKJV see שְׁנָא as an object (sleep is what is granted). It is difficult to see though how this fits in with the meaning in the context, and seems better to follow Brown-Driver-Briggs (446) and Gesenius (118L,3) who see this as an *accusative temporis* (accusative which determines the time when something happens). The NASB (“He gives to his beloved *even in his* sleep”) and the NIV footnote (“eat - for while they sleep he provides for...”) as well as the NRSV footnote (“for he provides for his beloved during sleep”) follow this approach. Likewise in a translation of the Jewish Publication Society, *The Holy Scriptures according to the Masoretic Text*: “So He giveth unto His beloved in sleep.” The Dutch N.V. does likewise: “Hij geeft het immers zijn beminden in den slaap.” These translations make good sense in the context: the futility of mere human striving is seen in the fact that God

gives so much to his children when they are sleeping! Noting the superscription to the psalm, it may be Solomon thinking back on the events of 1 Kings 3:5 - 15! No need then for the suggestion of J.A. Emerton (VT 24 (1974) 15 - 31) who through Ugaritic gives to אֲנָשׁ the meaning of “high estate” or “honour.”

A point aside here: in the NASB you see the drawback of putting words that are (supposedly) not in the text in italics. If it is an *acc. temporis*, then the words “even in his” are really in the text!

Verse 3

פְּרֵי הַבֶּטֶן

Striking here is the fact that the NIV has opted for “children” here instead of “fruit of the womb” as the others. TWOT (236a) agrees, but somehow the richness of poetic expression is lost.

Conclusions

All translations are faithful to the text, although of the three only the NASB follows the approach suggested in the second note regarding verse 2 (the NIV puts it in a footnote). The NIV is freer than desirable in verses 2 and 3.

A COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF PSALM 138

A. TEXTUAL COMPARISON AND COMMENTS

Verse 1

לְיָרֵךְ אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּכָל-לֵבָי

NASB	NIV	NKJV
A Psalm of David I WILL give Thee thanks with all my heart;	Of David I will praise you, O LORD, with all my heart;	A Psalm of David I WILL praise You with my whole heart;

COMMENT:

1. NASB and NKJV choose to follow the tradition of emending the text (adding “A Psalm” to the title), while the NIV limits itself more strictly to the Hebrew word. (LXX: Τῷ Δαυιδ)
2. NIV accepts the BHS footnote **Psalm 138,1^b** nonn Mss Vrs + יהוה (some Hebrew manuscripts and versions add “O LORD”) and therefore adds “O LORD” (as does the RSV). The text-critical alteration of the MT on this basis is acceptable, although not compelling.

Verse 2

כִּי-הִגְדַּלְתָּ עַל-כָּל-שֵׁמְךָ אֱמָרְתֶּךָ:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
For thou hast magnified Thy word according to all Thy name.	for you have exalted above all things / your name and your word.	For You have magnified Your word above all Your name.

COMMENT:

1. What does “all your name” mean? The NASB and NKJV have simply translated the expression literally without elucidating it for the reader.
2. How should one understand על in this expression? The NKJV gives us a questionable expression: God’s word is exalted *above* his name. The NASB (better than NKJV) says that God has magnified his word *according* to his name (cf Williams 290). Better than either is to take על as indicating advantage, “For you have magnified your word for the sake of all your name” (cf. Williams, 295).
3. The NIV handles the text much differently. It has altered the masoretic pointing by deleting the “maqeph” between כָּל and שְׁמֶךָ, thus isolating על-כָּל from שְׁמֶךָ. This solves the problem of the difficult expression, “all your name” by translating the isolated phrase, “above all things” and connecting the word שְׁמֶךָ (your name) to אִמְרֹתֶיךָ (your word). However, the translator must assume a simple waw connecting “your name” to “your word” to come to the translation “your name and your word”. This is possible, since this is a poetic passage. It should be noted that the NIV agrees with the RSV on this point which has, “thou hast exalted above everything / thy name and thy word.”

Verse 3

תְּרַחֲבֵנִי בְּנִפְשֵׁי עֹז:

NASB	NIV	NKJV
Thou didst make me bold with strength in my soul.	you made me bold and stouthearted.	And you made me bold with strength in my soul.

COMMENT:

1. The NIV renders “strength in my soul” by a more dynamic expression, “stouthearted”. This is a more familiar expression than “strength in my soul” (which in itself is an okay translation), but it sounds rather archaic. Each translation is responsible to the text.

Verse 5

וְיִשִּׁירָה

NASB	NIV	NKJV
And they will sing	May they sing	Yes, they shall sing

COMMENT:

1. As in vs 4, the NIV has rendered the imperfect as a jussive, which seems preferable in view of the vocative (“O Yahweh”) in vs 4. Another possible translation is, “so that they may sing”.
2. The copulative is translated in NASB as, “And”; in the NKJV the KJV “Yea” is reflected in “Yes”. The passages suffers nothing by leaving the copulative out as in the NIV. In each translation, the connective is treated consistently.

B. SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

Verse 1. NASB and NKJV emend the text by adding “A Psalm”. NIV emends BHS by adding “O LORD”.

Verse 2. NASB better than NKJV in dealing with a difficult text, but the NIV is better than both since it makes the best sense.

Verse 3 & 5. Each translation handles the text responsibly.

**A TEXTUAL COMPARISON
OF
CERTAIN PASSAGES IN HOSEA**

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1. BACKGROUND

In judging a translation's faithfulness, the question of its allegiance to the original text also needs to be investigated. In the Report on Bible translations that was submitted to the Synod at Toronto (1974), the passages in the RSV translation of Hosea marked as corrected (cn) were investigated (*Enclosure III* of that report). The point of this study was to see whether the RSV emendations were justified. It was concluded that emendations were unwarranted in 23 places, possibly warranted in 5 places and definitely warranted in only 2 places. Considering the information that was available to the RSV translators it was also concluded that the RSV resorts more easily to textual emendation than to philological data and thereby betrays a mistrust for the Masoretic Text (= the Hebrew Text in common use) that is not completely justified (*Enclosure III*).

2. PURPOSE

The purpose of this paper is to investigate how the NASB, NIV, and NKJV treat the Hebrew text of Hosea, compared to the way the RSV handled it at the points where the RSV considered it too full of difficulties to translate it and so emended it.

In presenting this comparison, we will not be repeating the argumentation of the 1974 Report (for or against emendation) but simply accept this report's conclusions, unless there is reason to challenge it at any point.

Since the passages to be discussed are generally difficult to translate, this comparison may also give us an insight into the translation techniques and approaches of the NASB, NIV, and the NKJV.

3. COMPARISON

i. Hos 2:23[25]

MT: וַיִּזְרַעְתִּיהָ “I will sow her”
 RSV emends to וַיִּזְרַעְתִּיהוּ “I will sow him”
 1974 REPORT: emendation not warranted.

NASB: “And I will sow her”
 NIV: “I will plant her”
 NKJV: “Then I will sow her”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NIV understands זָרַע here to mean “to plant”. While defensible¹, “sow” would be preferable since more specific words for “to plant” exist (e.g., שָׂחַל, נָטַע).

ii. Hos 4:4

MT: וְעַמְּךָ כַּמְרִיבֵי כֹהֵן “and your people are like those who contend with a priest”
 RSV emends to וְעִמְּךָ רִיבֵי הַכֹּהֵן “with you is my contention, O priest”.
 1974 REPORT: emendation is warranted.²

NASB: “For your people are like those who contend with the priest”
 NIV: “for your people are like those who bring charges against a priest”
 NKJV: “For your people *are* like those who contend with the priest”.

¹ See, e.g., F. Brown, S. R. Driver and C. A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (corrected reprint of the 1907 ed.; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962), 281.

² Besides the report, see especially C. Van Gelderen and W. H. Gispen, *Het Boek Hosea* (COT; Kampen: Kok, 90-92) and F. I. Andersen and D. N. Freedman, *Hosea* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 346-350.

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT and do not emend.

iii. Hos 4:18

MT: סר סבאָם “their drink/intoxication has turned aside/ended”

RSV emends to סור סובאָים “a band of drunkards”.

1974 REPORT: emendation is not warranted.

NASB: “Their liquor gone”

NIV: “Even when their drinks are gone”

NKJV: “Their drink is rebellion”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NKJV understands סור to mean “to rebel”. This is defensible³, but NASB and NIV are preferable for more specific words for “to rebel” exist (e.g., פשע, מרד).

iv. Hos 4:18

MT: אָהב אָהבו קלון מַגְנִיָּה “her rulers shamefully love, ‘give!’” (?)

RSV emends to אָהבו קלון מַגְנִיָּה “they love shame more than their glory”

1974 REPORT: emendation *seems* to be necessary. If אהבו is interpreted as a byform of אהב, then emendation is not necessary.⁴

NASB: “Their rulers [note: lit. *shields*] dearly love shame” (= אָהב אָהבו קלון מַגְנִיָּה)

NIV: “their rulers dearly love shameful ways” (= אָהב אָהבו קלון מַגְנִיָּה)

NKJV: “Her rulers dearly [note: Hebrew is difficult; a Jewish tradition reads *Her rulers shamefully love, “Give!”*] love dishonor” (= אָהב אָהבו קלון מַגְנִיָּה)

At first sight, NASB, NIV, and NKJV all appear to emend MT, unless the option mentioned above has been taken. Since none of these translations indicate that a text change has been made, one must assume an unemended MT, interpreting אהבו as a byform of אהב.

v. Hos 5:2

MT: וְשֹׁחֲטֵה שְׂטִיִּים הַעֲמִיקוּ “the revolvers are deep in slaughter”

³ Brown, Driver, Briggs, *Lexicon*, 693.

⁴ Cf. Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 379) who refer to an analogous Ugaritic alloform.

RSV emends to וְשָׁחַת הַשְּׁטִים הָעֲמִיקוּ “And they have made deep the pit of Shittim”

1974 REPORT: emendation is not entirely unjustified, but the text does not need to be emended to make sense.

NASB: “And the revoltors have gone deep in depravity” (note: “or waded deep in slaughter”)

NIV: “The rebels are deep in slaughter”

NKJV: “The revoltors are deeply involved in slaughter”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended.

vi Hos 5:8

MT: אַחֲרַיְךָ בְּנִימִין “behind you, O Benjamin”

RSV emends to הִתְרַיְדוּ בְּנִימִין “tremble, O Benjamin”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “Behind you, Benjamin”

NIV: “lead on, O Benjamin”.

NKJV: “*Look* behind you, O Benjamin”.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. However, the translations of the NIV and NKJV depart from a strictly literal (and ambiguous) translation and resort to clearer but different interpretative renderings. (There is no note indicating a textual change.) Thus the NIV is an interpretation of the literal “Behind you O Benjamin”, indicating that others say in effect: “we’re behind you Benjamin!”, i.e. supporting you (cf. the commentaries), and therefore, “lead on!”. Also the NKJV gives an interpretative translation be it different from that offered by the NIV.

vii Hos 5:13

MT: מֶלֶךְ רָב “the great King” (trad. “King Jareb”)

RSV: emends to מֶלֶךְ רָב or מֶלֶךְ רַב “the great King” (cf. commentaries)

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “King Jareb” (note: “or, *the avenging king*, or *the great king*)

NIV: “the great king”

NKJV: “King Jareb”

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. It is unfortunate that NASB and NKJV translate “King Jareb” (out of a sense of tradition?) as no such name appears to exist and a good case can be made to translate “the great king”.⁵ (The New RSV also quite unnecessarily retains a correction footnote here.) The translation of the NIV is thus the most appropriate.

viii Hos 6:7

MT: כְּאָדָם “like Adam”
 RSV emends to אֶת־אָדָם “at Adam”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “like Adam [note: or *men*]”
 NIV: “like Adam [note: Or *As at Adam*; or *Like men*]”
 NKJV: “like men [note: Or *like Adam*]”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NKJV is surprising. We would favour “like Adam”. Probably, NKJV simply sticks to KJV which has “like men”.

ix Hos 6:9

MT: כְּהִכִּי אִישׁ גְּדוּדִים “as robbers lie in wait”
 RSV apparently emends to something like כְּהִכִּי אִישׁ פְּקֻדוֹת גְּדוּדִים “as robbers lie in wait for a man”.
 1974 REPORT: emendation is not necessary since possible solutions exist for the orthographic problem with הִכָּה.⁶

NASB: “And as raiders wait for a man”.
 NIV: “As marauders lie in ambush for a man”. Same comment as with NASB.
 NKJV: “As bands of robbers lie in wait for a man”. Same comment as with NASB.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all apparently retain MT unemended. All these translations either take אִישׁ as an object (which is not convincing given the Hebrew word order) or they supply (quite unnecessarily) “man” to complete the verb.

⁵ See especially J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (with additions and corrections. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 123, and recent commentaries.

⁶ Also cf., e.g., Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 441.

x Hos 6:9

MT: חֲבֵר כֹּהֲנִים “a band of priests”

RSV emends to something like הִתְחַבְּרוּ כֹהֲנֵינוּ “the priests are banded together”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “a band of priests”

NIV: “bands of priests”

NKJV: “the company of priests”.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NIV takes חֲבֵר as collective (which is legitimate). In the NKJV, the definite article is unexpected and not necessary. The KJV also had it thus.

xi Hos 7:12

MT: כְּשִׁמְעוּ לְעֵדוֹתָם trad. lit. “according to the report to their assembly”

RSV emends to רָעָתָם “for their wicked deeds”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “(I will chastise them) in accordance with the proclamation [note: Lit., *report*] to their assembly”

NIV: “When I hear them flocking together, (I will catch them)”

NKJV: “(I will chastise them) According to what their congregation has heard”

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NASB and the NKJV reflect the traditional understanding of the terms in question. (Cf. KJV: “I will chastise them, as their congregation hath heard.”) A good case can be made for the NIV rendition. עֵדָה is sometimes used of animals (e.g., Judg 14:8). Since the context is the image of birds, שָׁמַע can relate to either one’s hearing them swarm, or to the sound of the swarming. The Dutch Nieuwe Vertaling has something similar: “Zodra hum zwerm rumoerig wordt, neem ik ze gevangen”.⁷

xii Hos 7:16

MT: יָשׁוּבוּ לֹא עַל “they turn, not upward”

RSV emends to יָשׁוּבוּ לְבַעַל “they turn to Baal”

⁷ See further especially Van Gelderen and Gispen, *Hosea*, 261-262.

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “They turn, *but* not upward”

NIV: “they do not turn to the Most High”

NKJV: “they return, *but* not to the Most High”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NIV and NKJV are not literal translations, but they do get the sense across accurately. It is interesting to note that this “dynamic equivalent” rendering was also that of the KJV.

xiii Hos 8:1

MT: כַּנְּשָׁר עַל־בַּיִת יְהוָה “like a vulture over the house of the LORD”

RSV emends to כִּי נְשָׂר עַל־בַּיִת יְהוָה “for a vulture is over the house of the LORD”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “like an eagle *the enemy comes* against the house of the LORD”

NIV: “an eagle is over the house of the LORD”

NKJV: “*He shall come* like an eagle against the house of the LORD”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. It is of interest to note how the translations approached the problem. Both the NASB and the NKJV supply a subject and verb and each give their own (mutually exclusive) interpretation. While the NASB speaks of the enemy, the NKJV (similar to KJV) suggests the LORD will come in judgment. The NIV neatly avoids the whole problem by changing the simile into a metaphor and thus leaving the text ambiguous as it is in the original, without supplying any interpretative addition.

xiv Hos 8:13

MT: זָבְחֵי הַבְּהֵמָה uncertain, traditionally “sacrifices of my gifts”.

RSV emends to זָבְחוֹ אֲהָבָו “they love sacrifice”

1974 REPORT: emendation cannot be said to be unwarranted, but to say that emendation is absolutely necessary may go too far.

NASB: “As for my sacrificial gifts”

NIV: “They offer sacrifices given to me”

NKJV: “*For* the sacrifices of My offerings”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The term זָבְחֵי הַבְּהֵמָה (a hapax legomenon) is difficult and much discussed and other alternatives may very well be correct. NASB, NIV, and NKJV

continue in the general line of the KJV (*for the sacrifices of mine offerings*”).

xv Hos 9:4

MT: כְּלֶחֶם אוֹנִיִּים לָהֶם “like bread of mourners to them”

RSV emends to כְּלֶחֶם אוֹנִיִּים לְהֶמָּה “their bread shall be like mourners bread”.

1974 REPORT: it is preferable to read unemended (although the problem is more academic than real, since the translation does not need to vary very much).

NASB: “*Their bread will be* [note: Lit. *be to them*] like mourners’ bread [Or, *bread of misfortune*]”

NIV: “Such sacrifices will be to them like the bread of mourners”

NKJV: “*It shall be* like bread of mourners to them”.

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. In light of the discussions that have taken place on this verse, it would have been more appropriate for the NASB to say that they emend the text. Their translation is virtually the same as the RSV, and the note (Lit. *be to them*) is not convincing given their translation with the considerable interpretative expansion. The NIV and NKJV are more obviously based on an unemended text. Note how both the NIV and NKJV are compelled to supply a subject so that the translation becomes meaningful in the context.

xvi Hos 9:6

MT: כִּי־הִנֵּה הֵלְכוּ מֵאֵד “for behold, they have gone because of destruction [or: from destruction]”

RSV apparently emends the last two words to הֵלְכוּ אֶל־אֲשׁוּר or אֲשׁוּר “For behold, they are going to Assyria”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “For behold, they will go because of destruction”

NIV: “Even if they escape from destruction”

NKJV: “For indeed they are gone because of destruction.”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NIV, although not a traditional translation, accurately conveys the force of כִּי הִנֵּה in this context of the perfect verbal aspect followed by the imperfects (cf. the Dutch Nieuwe Vertaling: “Want zie, al zijn zij aan de verwoesting ontkomen”).

xvii Hos 9:13

MT: אֶפְרַיִם כִּפְאָשֶׁר־רָאִיתִי לְצוּר שְׂתוּלָה בְּנֹהָ possibly ? “Ephraim, as I have seen Tyre, is planted in a pleasant place”.

RSV emends the last three words to לְצִיד שְׂתוּ לָהֶם בְּנֵיהָ “Ephraim’s sons, as I have seen, are destined for a prey”

1974 REPORT: emendation of the vocalization is warranted.

Emendation of the consonants seems to be unnecessary.

NASB: “Ephraim, as I have seen,

Is planted in a pleasant meadow like Tyre”

NIV: “I have seen Ephraim, like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place”

NKJV: “Just as I saw Ephraim like Tyre, planted in a pleasant place”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended and work with it to the best of their ability. There is a clear loyalty to the MT here for the MT is very difficult.⁸

xviii Hos 10:5

MT: יִגִּילוּ “shall rejoice”

RSV emends to יִלְלִילוּ “shall wail”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “will cry out [note: Or, who *used to rejoice over*]”

NIV: “who had rejoiced”

NKJV: “shriek”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The context is a prophecy that the idolatrous priests will mourn the loss of the calf of Beth-aven, the calf over which they will wail (RSV) or used to rejoice (MT). The NASB mentions both ways (in text and note) on the premise that גִּיל can have both joyful and negative connotations. Evidence for the latter is either non-existent or rather sparse though.⁹ For that reason the NKJV is not the best here either. “Shriek” is used in a negative sense, given the context of NKJV. Since the imperfect can refer to repeated past action, the NIV rendition is very good, as is the translation in the NASB note.

⁸ See, e.g., A. R. Hulst, *Old Testament Translation Problems* (Helps for Translators 1. Leiden: Brill, 1960), 234-235 and commentaries.

⁹ See, e.g., J. Bergmann, H. Ringgren and Ch. Barth in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, VI (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1975) 469-475.

xix Hos 10:6

What follows is similar to the emendation found in Hos 5:13.

MT: מֶלֶךְ יָרֵב “the great King” (trad. “King Jareb”)

RSV: emends to מֶלֶךְ רַב or מֶלֶכִי רַב “the great King” (cf. commentaries)

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “King Jareb” (note: “or, *the avenging king*, or *the great king*)

NIV: “the great king”

NKJV: “King Jareb”

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. It is unfortunate that NASB and NKJV translate “King Jareb” (out of a sense of tradition?) as no such name appears to exist and a good case can be made to translate “the great king”.¹⁰ (The New RSV also quite unnecessarily retains a correction footnote here.) The translation of the NIV is thus the most appropriate.

xx Hos 10:6

MT: וַיִּבּוֹשׂ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֲצָתוֹ traditionally “and Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel”

RSV emends to וַיִּבּוֹשׂ יִשְׂרָאֵל מֵעֲצָבּוֹ “and Israel shall be ashamed of his idol”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “And Israel will be ashamed of its own counsel.”

NIV: “Israel will be ashamed of its wooden idols [note: or *its counsel*].”

NKJV: “And Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel.”

NASB and NKJV clearly retain MT unemended. NIV by its silence claims to adhere to the MT for it has a policy of noting readings which diverge from the MT (cf. *Preface*). How then can the NIV translation in the text (“wooden idols” which fits well contextually) be justified on the basis of the MT? It has become widely accepted that עֲצָב, besides the usual meaning “advice, plan”, can also mean “idol” (as fem. of עֲצָ).¹¹ So also the NIV adheres to the MT.

¹⁰ See especially J. Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (with additions and corrections. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1987), 123, and recent commentaries.

¹¹ See W. Baumgartner et al., *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament*, fasc. 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1983), 821. Also, e.g. Andersen and Freedman (*Hosea*, 558) who maintain the MT and translate “image”, giving their (persuasive) reasons.

xxi Hos 10:10

MT: בְּאַנְתִּי “in my desire”
 RSV emends to וְבָאתִי “I will come”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “When it is my desire”
 NIV: “When I please”
 NKJV: “When *it is* my desire”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. Due to the nature of the case, all the translations can be considered somewhat free.

xxii Hos 10:15

MT: בְּשַׁחַר נִדְמָה נִדְמָה מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל “in the morning, the king of Israel will be completely cut off”
 RSV emends the first word to בְּשַׁעַר “in the storm, the king of Israel shall be utterly cut off”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “At dawn the king of Israel will be completely cut off”
 NIV: “When that day dawns, the king of Israel will be completely destroyed.”
 NKJV: “In a morning the king of Israel shall be cut off utterly.”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NIV is somewhat freer, presumably for contextual reasons.

xxiii Hos 11:6

MT: וְאַכְלָה מִמַּעֲצוֹתֵיהֶם “and (the sword) will consume because of their counsels”
 RSV emends to something like וְאַכְלָה בְּמַצְוֵיהֶם “devour them in their fortresses”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “And consume *them* because of their counsels”
 NIV: “and put an end to their plans”
 NKJV: “And consume *them*,
 Because of their own counsels”.

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The NASB and NKJV supply an object, although this is not necessary. Indeed, some of the force of the original (the undefined consuming, i.e., everything will be destroyed) is lost in this way. (Cf. New RSV “devours because of their schemes”). The NIV makes מְמַעְצוֹתֵיהֶם the object of the verb. This approach however is not very convincing. מִן would be expected to yield a partitive idea. Furthermore, the context (parallelism) argues against the NIV’s rendering.

xxiv Hos 11:9

MT: וְלֹא אָבוֹא בְּעִיר “I will not come in excitement”
 RSV emends to וְלֹא אָבוֹא לְבַעַר “I will not come to destroy”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “And I will not come in wrath [note: Lit. *excitement*]”
 NIV: “I will not come in wrath [note: Or *come against any city*]”
 NKJV: “And I will not come with terror [note: Or *I will not enter a city*]”.

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain MT unemended. The fact that the vocabulary raises questions is indicated by the notes.

xxv Hos 11:12[12:1]

MT: וַיְהוּדָה עַד רֹד עִם־אֵל “And Judah still wanders with respect to God”
 RSV emends to וַיְהוּדָה עַד יָדַע עִם־אֵל “but Judah is still known by God”
 1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “Judah is also unruly against God”
 NIV: “And Judah is unruly against God”
 NKJV: “But Judah still walks with God”

It appears that NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain the MT unemended. The NKJV wants to keep a positive note about Judah (as the KJV and also RSV did), but this does not appear to be justified in view of the context (cf. Hos. 8:14; 12:2[3]).

xxvi Hos 12:8[9]

MT: כָּל־יִגְיעֵי לֹא יִמְצְאוּ־לִי עוֹן אֲשֶׁר־הִטָּא “all my labours [or property], - they will not find for me iniquity, that is, sin”
 RSV emends to כָּל־יִגְיעֵיו לֹא יִמְצְאוּ לְעוֹן אֲשֶׁר־הִטָּא “but all his riches can never offset the guilt he has incurred”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “In all my labors they will find in me
No iniquity, which *would be* sin.”

NIV: “With all my wealth they will not find in me any iniquity or sin.”

NKJV: “*In* all my labors
They shall find in me no iniquity that *is* sin.”

Thus the NASB, NIV, and NKJV all retain the MT unemended. A difficulty with the NASB and NKJV is that they could suggest that there is iniquity which is not sin. This problem could have been avoided by translating “iniquity which is surely sin” or the like. NIV avoids this problem rephrasing to get the intent across.

xxvii Hos 13:6

MT: קַמְרַעֲיָתָם וַיִּשְׂבְּעוּ “in accord with their pasture and they were satisfied”

RSV emends to כָּרְעוּתָם וַיִּשְׂבְּעוּ “but when they had fed to the full”

1974 REPORT: emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “As *they had* their pasture, they became satisfied”

NIV: “When I fed them, they were satisfied”

NKJV: “When they had pasture, they were filled”

Thus the NASB, and NKJV retain the MT unemended. What about the NIV? There is no note indicating a divergency from the MT and we may assume that NIV wishes to remain faithful to it. One could reason that whereas NASB and NKJV simply treat קַמְרַעֲיָתָם as a noun meaning “pasture”, the NIV translation understands it as a verbal noun with the force of כָּרְעוּתָי אֲתָם as once proposed by H. S. Nyberg.¹² This is however a position that has not found general acceptance. Those who wish to translate as NIV generally acknowledge emending the text.¹³ On another point, whereas NASB italicize “they had”, NKJV does not, showing inconsistency on the latter’s part.

xxviii Hos 13:10

MT: וַיִּוָּשֶׁעַךְ בְּכָל-עָרֶיךָ וְשֹׁפְטֶיךָ “so that he may save you in all your cities and your judges”

¹² In his *Studien zum Hoseabuche* (1935). For a more readily accessible description of this position, see Van Gelderen and Gispen, *Hosea*, 411-412.

¹³ As, e.g., New RSV and Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 635. Also see Baumgartner, *Lexikon*, 602.

RSV emends to וַיִּוֹשִׁיעֶנּוּ וְכָל־שָׂרֵיךָ יִשְׁפָּטֶנּוּ “to save you; where are all your princes, to defend you?” (Cf. the syntax of this verse. RSV supplies “where are” from the beginning of this verse.)
1974 REPORT: Emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “That he may save you in all your cities,
And your judges”

NIV: “that he may save you? Where are your rulers in all your towns”
(NIV supplies “where are” from the beginning of this verse)

NKJV: “That he may save you in all your cities? And your judges”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV retain the MT unemended. One can raise the question whether the NIV is really accurate in linking “your rulers” with “in all your towns”. The NIV seems guided by trying to achieve a balanced parallelism, a consideration which probably prompted the RSV to emend the text. In all fairness (and in defence of the NIV), the New RSV translates similarly as the NIV and now considers itself faithful to the MT and does not indicate a correction.

xxix Hos 13:15

MT: “though he may flourish among his brothers”

RSV emends to כִּי הוּא כְּאֶהָיִם נִפְרִיא or כִּי הוּא כְּאֶחָיו נִפְרִיא “though he may flourish as the reed plant”

1974 REPORT: Emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “Though he flourishes among the reeds [note: Or, *brothers*]”

NIV: “even though he thrives among his brothers”

NKJV: “Though he is fruitful among *his* brethren”

Thus NIV, and NKJV retain the MT unemended. It appears that the NASB wishes to retain the MT unchanged as well, judging from the note. However, the NASB’s “among the reeds” is not interchangeable with “among the brothers” as the note suggests, and this seems to be a translation error. To be accurate, the translation “reeds” should have been marked as an emendation.¹⁴

xxx Hos 14:5[6]

¹⁴ The 1974 REPORT (*Enclosure III*) was in error when it stated on Hos 13:15 that אָהָיִם is a variant for אֶחָיו (pl. of אָהָיו, reed[s]). אָהָיִם is pl. of “reed”. אָהָיִם is plural of אָהָ “brother”. See Baumgartner, *Lexikon*, 30 and D. J. A. Clines, *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*, vol. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 183. These standard works indicate either conjecture or emendation respectively for the meaning “reeds” at Hos 13:15.

MT: וַיִּךְ שָׁרְשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן “and he shall strike his roots like the Lebanon”
 RSV emends to וַיִּךְ שָׁרְשָׁיו כְּלִבְנֵה “he shall strike root as the poplar”
 1974 REPORT: Emendation is unwarranted.

NASB: “And he will take root [lit., *strike his roots*] like *the cedars of Lebanon*.”

NIV: “Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots”

NKJV: “And lengthen his roots like Lebanon”

Thus NASB, NIV, and NKJV retain the MT unemended. It should be noted that both the NASB and NIV add an interpretative detail respecting the cedars of Lebanon. Others prefer to think of the crocuses or olive trees of Lebanon,¹⁵ or the mountains of Lebanon.¹⁶ The precision and the resulting ambiguity of the NKJV is to be preferred since it more accurately reflects the original.

4. CONCLUSIONS

i The NASB, NIV, and NKJV all want to be faithful to the MT. There is not one instance in which they indicate a departure from it. This positive attitude to the MT stands in sharp contrast to the RSV which emended the MT thirty times.

Theoretically, it is however possible that all translations considered did emend MT of Hos 4:18.

It has also been noted that the NASB should indicate an emendation on its translation of Hos 9:4 and 13:15.

Questions have arisen whether NIV does justice to the MT of Hos 13:6 and whether NKJV does justice to the MT of Hos 11:12[12:1].

ii The passages considered were all quite difficult. It therefore seems appropriate to note the following on the manner of translating.

a. The practice of substituting words considered to be understood is a two-edged sword. On the one hand it can clarify and obviously has its place where a translation would otherwise be less clear or unintelligible (as in Hos 7:16; 9:4; 10:10). On the other hand, it can remove an ambiguity from a translation which should be retained because it was there in the original (as in Hos 5:8; 8:1; 10:15; 11:16 and 14:5[6]).

¹⁵ Andersen and Freedman, *Hosea*, 646.

¹⁶ Van Gelderen and Gispén, *Hosea*, 423.

Precision and ambiguity was successfully retained by the NASB twice (Hos 5:8; 10:15), by the NIV once (Hos 8:1) and by the NKJV twice (Hos 10:15 and 14:5[6]).

b. On occasion there appeared to be a slavish following of the so-called King James tradition. This was noticeable in Hos 5:13 and 10:6 where the NASB and NKJV stuck to the KJV's rendition for which there is far less ground today. The NIV translation was the most appropriate. In Hos 6:7; 6:9 and 11:12[12:1] the NKJV also seems to follow KJV although this is somewhat unexpected since the translations are either not as appropriate or less than literal. On the other hand there was a justifiable caution on the part of all translations under consideration in following tradition in Hos 8:13.

c. The NIV is clearly a new translation and not a revision of an earlier one (as NASB and NKJV). The advantages are that the NIV is fresh and willing to look anew at a text without being encumbered by tradition (although also not hostile to it!). This was particularly noticeable, for example, in Hos 7:12 and 9:6 where fine distinctive translations are found.

**A COMPARISON
OF
TRANSLATIONS OF ZECHARIAH 12**

What follows is a comparison of the NASB, NIV, and NKJV in which significant points of difference are examined. This means that some verses are only partially discussed and others are dealt with in their entirety. It would be best to read and study this material with an open Bible for possible contextual and other considerations.

This particular passage was chosen for no particular reason except that I had done work on Zechariah 12-14 recently.

A. THE TEXT MATERIAL

§ I. ZECHARIAH 12:1

HEBREW: נִשְׁבָּע

NASB: burden [note: Or *oracle*]

NIV: An Oracle

NKJV: burden [note: Or *oracle*]

COMMENT:

1. NASB and NKJV give an incomprehensible translation and hence feel compelled to add the note.
2. Furthermore, NASB and NKJV are inconsistent. NASB translates נִשְׁבָּע, for example, “oracle” with the note “or *burden*” in Isa 13:1; 15:1 and Jer 23:33, 38. NKJV translates as “oracle”, but without a note in Jer 23:33, 38. But in Isa 13:1 and 15:1, NKJV translates the term in question with “burden” and without a note.
3. NIV consistently translates “oracle” in Isa 13:1 and 15:1 and it is noteworthy that in Jer 23:33 (NIV also translates “oracle”), where there is a possible play on נִשְׁבָּע, this word is twice footnoted to make the possible pun clear (viz. note: Or *burden* [see Septuagint and Vulgate]; note: Hebrew; Septuagint and Vulgate ‘*You are the burden*’ [The Hebrew for *oracle* and *burden* is the same.]). There is no such note to alert readers to the possible double meaning that the Hebrew alludes to

(by noting the Septuagint and Vulgate renderings) in the NASB and NKJV.

CONCLUSION:

The NIV is to be preferred for it gives a more comprehensible translation, is more consistent, and footnotes where necessary.

§ II. ZECHARIAH 12:1

HEBREW: נֹאֲמֵי יְהוָה

NASB: *Thus* declares the LORD

NIV: The LORD ... declares

NKJV: Thus says the LORD

COMMENT:

1. The inconsistencies that italicizing leads to are clear when comparing NASB and NKJV. The NASB is correct in italicizing according to its convention and the NKJV is inconsistent.

2. The NKJV is to be faulted for making its translation the same as for the more common כִּה אָמַר יְהוָה. NASB and NIV correctly use the term “declare” to distinguish נֹאֲמֵי from אָמַר.

CONCLUSION:

The NIV is the preferred translation for it gives a distinctive translation for distinctive Hebrew vocabulary and supplies no additional English word (“thus”), which is really unnecessary for understanding the text.

§ III. ZECHARIAH 12:2

HEBREW: הִנֵּה אֲנִי עֹשֶׂה

NASB: Behold, I am going to make

NIV: I am going to make

NKJV: Behold, I will make

COMMENT:

The NASB and the NKJV give expression to הִנֵּה and thereby alert the reader (as the Hebrew intended) that the words of Yahweh follow. The NIV gives no discernible expression to הִנֵּה .

CONCLUSION:

The NASB and NKJV are to be preferred because they give expression to הִנָּהּ.

§ IV. ZECHARIAH 12:2

HEBREW: אֲנֹכִי שֹׂם אֶת־יְרוּשָׁלַם סֶהַרְעֵל לְכָל־הָעַמִּים סְבִיב

NASB: I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that causes reeling to all the peoples around;

NIV: I am going to make Jerusalem a cup that sends all the surrounding peoples reeling.

NASB: I will make Jerusalem a cup of drunkenness to all the surrounding peoples,

COMMENT:

1. NASB notes with “that causes reeling” - “Lit. of reeling”.
2. The NASB and NIV translations are quite similar and very close to the Hebrew. The NKJV interpretes רַעַל to be the reeling of drunkenness. This is debatable since it probably refers to the reeling caused by God’s judgment. This interpretation is also unnecessary here.

CONCLUSION:

The NASB and NIV are to be preferred for they are closer to the Hebrew. The NIV is the most fluent.

§ V. ZECHARIAH 12:2

HEBREW: וְגַם עַל־יְהוּדָה יִהְיֶה בְּמִצּוֹר עַל־יְרוּשָׁלַם:

NASB: and when the siege is against Jerusalem, it will also be against Judah.

NIV: Judah will be besieged as well as Jerusalem.

NKJV: when they lay siege against Judah and Jerusalem.

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and the NKJV appear to interpret ך to mean “when”. The NKJV is preferred on this point for its translation is more to the point. The NIV starts a new sentence which is the best for this begins a new unit (expressed by ך) and it maintains the ambiguity of the original which does not expressly specify a time.
2. The NKJV supplies a subject (probably the correct one, referring to enemies). NASB and NIV avoid making a choice here and so are closer to the original. NKJV does not expressly translate ׁ which both NASB and NIV do.

CONCLUSION:

The NIV is to be preferred for it stays closest to the original.

§ VI. ZECHARIAH 12:3

HEBREW: וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא

NASB: And it will come about in that day that

NIV: On that day

NKJV: And it shall happen in that day that

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and NKJV translate literally and the resulting English is somewhat awkward (cf., e.g., the two “that”s in close proximity). The NIV gets the same sense across (the accompanying verb is in the future) and the English is much smoother.

2. This phrase, which is also found in 12:9, appears to be a variant of the recurring phrase בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא which is found in 12:4, 6, 8, 11. There is no discernible difference in meaning. For example, no new section is introduced by either of the two instances of the longer formulation.

3. Since this appears to be a matter of variation in Hebrew style, there is no compelling reason to insist on its presence in an English translation since accuracy does not appear to be sacrificed if a translation of וְהָיָה is left out. It is interesting to note that the New Dutch Version (of 1951) translates the phrase in question (in 12:3, 9) by “Te dien dage” (which is the same translation as accorded the shorter Hebrew formulation). The RSV dealt similarly with this question as the New Dutch Version and the NIV.

CONCLUSION:

On a word for word level the NASB and NKJV are more literal. All the translations are accurate in conveying the point of the text. Since the NIV reads more smoothly, it is to be preferred.¹

§ VII. ZECHARIAH 12:3

HEBREW: אָבָן מִצִּמְסָה

¹ Also cf. comments on 2 Sam 6:16 in the paper on the translation of selected chapters of 2 Samuel which is included with this report.

NASB: a heavy stone
NIV: an immovable rock
NKJV: a very heavy stone

COMMENT:

It is difficult to be dogmatic on the precise meaning of a hapax legomenon. All the translations are responsible and make sense in the context.

CONCLUSION:

No decision of preference needs to be made.

§ VIII. ZECHARIAH 12:3 in its entirety

HEBREW:

וְהָיָה בַּיּוֹם־הַהוּא אֲשֶׁר יִרְדּוּ שָׁלֹם אָבֹן מִמַּעֲמָסָה לְכָל־הָעַמִּים כְּלִי־עִמְסָה שָׂרוּט וְשָׂרוּט וְנִאֲסַפּוּ עָלֶיהָ כָּל־גּוֹיֵי הָאָרֶץ:

NASB: And it will come about in that day that I will make Jerusalem a heavy stone for all the peoples; all who lift it will be severely injured. And all the nations of the earth will be gathered against it.

NIV: On that day, when all the nations of the earth are gathered against her, I will make Jerusalem an immovable rock for all the nations. All who try to move it will injure themselves.

NKJV: And it shall happen in that day that I will make Jerusalem a very heavy stone for all peoples; all who would heave it away will surely be cut in pieces, though all nations of the earth are gathered against it.

COMMENT 1:

1. The NASB follows the Hebrew word order exactly and the translation is very literal. The NKJV does this too, but translates the final וְ by “though”, thus removing one element of Hebrew style that does not suit English syntax that well. The NIV handles the difficulty of the last clause differently by integrating it into the main sentence and introducing it by “when”. This is the most fluent English.

2. The above raises questions. Is the NASB being faithful to the meaning and intent of the Hebrew by translating “and” before the final clause? Is the final clause an additional event in the chain of events recounted? Or is the meaning of the Hebrew otherwise? One would have to agree that the enemies mentioned at the end of the verse would

have to be there during the events recounted at the beginning of the verse. Thus the NASB could be misleading.

The NKJV solves this problem by placing “though” in front of the last clause, thus indicating that the enemies are already there when they try to move the stone Jerusalem.

The NIV likewise solves the problem by making the last clause an integrated temporal clause introduced by “when”.

The use of “though” or “when” does not make a great deal of difference for conveying the meaning of the Hebrew. (“for” could also have been used.) One could argue that the time element which is clearly implied in the text is best expressed by the NIV and that the NKJV is going a bit further in interpretation by using “though”. But, seeing the nature of the difficulty, this is quibbling. Both the NIV and NKJV give a good rendering of the Hebrew.

COMMENT 2:

One specific point should be noted. The NIV does not express the emphasis indicated in the Hebrew by the infinitive absolute of שָׂרַט . This emphasis is in the translation of NASB and NKJV.

CONCLUSION:

With respect to the overall syntax, the NIV and the NKJV are to be preferred. The NIV has the best English style, but it does falter on not expressing the emphasis שָׂרַט has in the Hebrew.

§ IX. ZECHARIAH 12:4

HEBREW: נֹאֲמֵי־יהוה

NASB: declares the LORD

NIV: declares the LORD

NKJV: says the LORD

COMMENT:

See above at § II.

CONCLUSION:

The NASB and NIV are to be preferred.

§ X. ZECHARIAH 12:4

HEBREW: וְעַל־בֵּית יְהוָה אֶפְקַח אֶת־עֵינַי

NASB: But I will watch over the house of Judah

NIV: I will keep a watchful eye over the house of Judah

NKJV: I will open My eyes on the house of Judah

COMMENT:

1. The NKJV is the most literal. (The NASB places the literal translation in a footnote.) But is it a good translation? Did the Lord have His eyes shut over Judah up to this point? But cf. 12:2.

2. The NASB and the NIV are more to the point, with the NIV retaining the object “eye” which also appears in the Hebrew.

CONCLUSION:

The NASB and NIV are better than NKJV. In favour of the NASB is the fact that it footnotes the literal meaning so that one studying Scripture can see the contrast between the open eye of Yahweh and the closed eyes and the blindness inflicted on the war horses of the enemy. In favour of the NIV is the retention of the object “eye” right in the text.

§ XI. ZECHARIAH 12:4

HEBREW: וְכָל סוּס הָעַמִּים אֶקֶה בְּעִנְרוֹן

NASB: while I strike every horse of the peoples with blindness

NIV: but I will blind all the horses of the nations

NKJV: and will strike every horse of the peoples with blindness

COMMENT:

1. The important point here is the translation of וְ. NKJV translates (like the KJV) “and”, showing insensitivity to Hebrew syntax and importing Hebraisms into the translation.

2. NASB and NIV are more accurate translations. The NASB interprets the clause as circumstantial (which is agreeable with the syntax here) while the NIV interprets the *waw* as adversative, which is also possible.

CONCLUSION:

The NASB and NIV are to be preferred. The NIV is better English.

§ XII. ZECHARIAH 12:5

HEBREW: אִמְצָה לִי יְשֻׁבֵי יְרוּשָׁלַם בֵּיתָהּ

NASB: A strong support for us are the inhabitants of Jerusalem through the Lord

NIV: The people of Jerusalem are strong, because the LORD (is God)

NKJV: The inhabitants of Jerusalem are my strength in the LORD

COMMENT:

1. The difficulty lies on two fronts. The hapax legomenon אֲמָצָה and especially the function of לְ. The sense of what appears to be the literal Hebrew also raises questions. The NKJV gives a literal rendering and the NASB a slightly less literal (substituting the first plural suffix for the singular). But what does it mean that the inhabitants are one's strength in the LORD? Is the LORD Himself not Jerusalem's strength?

2. The NIV, judging from its translation, has apparently followed a Hebrew Manuscript and the Targum (cf. BHS note) and decided that the text is: אֲמָצָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיְהוָה . This yields the literal translation: "a strong support for the inhabitants of Jerusalem because the LORD" (is God). Since the NIV follows a Hebrew text within the Masoretic tradition, the NIV considers itself faithful to the Masoretic tradition and therefore such changes as these are not normally footnoted (see the *Preface*). This text yields very good sense and has support (be it relatively small) textually and in the Targum. The NIV gives a good translation of this text.

3. One could argue that NIV's "people of Jerusalem" is inferior to "inhabitants of Jerusalem" of NASB and NKJV. One could also posit that since the genitive "of Jerusalem" indicates where they live, there is no loss of meaning. However, NIV uses "inhabitants" in Zec 12:7 and could have used it here.

CONCLUSION:

This passage as given in BHS is very difficult. The literal rendering is quite awkward (as is the Hebrew) and runs into objections of context and the basic Biblical message that a people's only strength is the LORD. On the other hand, the Hebrew text which NIV uses is very attractive since the above objections are answered. As is the nature of the case in situations such as this, one cannot *prove* that it really is the best text. But, if one had to choose, the NIV would be the best.

§ XIII. ZECHARIAH 12:5

HEBREW: בְּיְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵינוּ

NASB: through the LORD of hosts, their God

NIV: because the LORD Almighty is their God.

NKJV: in the LORD of hosts, their God.

COMMENT:

1. The NASB and NKJV translate תְּהִיאֵם in the traditional manner.
2. The NIV made the conscious choice to render Almighty “because for most readers today the phrase ‘the LORD of hosts’ ... has little meaning” (*Preface*). To ensure that the reader knows when Hebrew has יהוה , (which can also be translated “Almighty”), the NIV footnotes all occurrences of this word.
3. It is important to note that the Septuagint transliterates יהוה תְּהִיאֵם (as κύριος σαβᾶθ) but also translates with κύριος παντοκράτωρ.² The NIV rendering thus stays within a long-standing tradition by translating according to the second option of the Septuagint.³

CONCLUSION:

Opinion will probably remain divided over how to translate the names of God in the Old Testament (cf. the ongoing disagreement about Yahweh/LORD where the church has followed the Septuagint). This particular issue should not be a decisive factor for or against any of the translations under discussion.

§ XIV. ZECHARIAH 12:6

HEBREW: וְיִשְׁבְּהָ יְרוּשָׁלַם עוֹד תְּהִיָּה בִירוּשָׁלַם

NASB: while the inhabitants of Jerusalem again dwell on their own sites in Jerusalem

NIV: but Jerusalem will remain intact in her place

NKJV: but Jerusalem shall be inhabited again in her own place --
Jerusalem

COMMENT:

² See E. Hatch and H. A. Redpath, *A Concordance to the Septuagint and Other Greek Versions of the Old Testament* (2 Vols. with supplement; Oxford: Clarendon, 1897, 1906), 2, 1053-1054, 1256.

³ See further on this issue, e.g., W. F. Arndt and F. W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 613-614; K. L. Barker, “YHWH Sabaoth: ‘The LORD Almighty’”, in K. L. Barker, ed., *The NIV. The Making of a Contemporary Translation* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1991), 106-110.

1. NASB supplies “the inhabitants of” but does not indicate this with italics as is its convention. It is to the credit of NIV and NKJV that they retain the subject as found in Hebrew, viz., Jerusalem.
2. In NIV “intact” apparently emphasizes that she remains in Jerusalem and hence the second “Jerusalem” is not mentioned.
3. NKJV translates passive which is possible, but destroys the image of Jerusalem as a woman. (The feminine form of the verb is used and the fem. suffix with “place”). Cf. Lam 1:1-2.

CONCLUSION:

None of the translations are outstanding. Would this not be best? “Jerusalem will dwell again in her place, in Jerusalem.” If one had to make a choice, the NKJV would be preferred.

§ XV. ZECHARIAH 12:7

HEBREW: אֶהֱלֵי יְהוּדָה

NASB: the tents of Judah

NIV: the dwellings of Judah

NKJV: the tents of Judah

COMMENT:

1. NASB and NKJV translate “tents” which is the first and obvious meaning of אֶהֱלֵי .
2. In so far as “tents” are used metaphorically here (since Judah’s nomadic existence is history), one can understand the NIV “dwellings”. However, the fact that this expression is unique to this place, should caution a translator to dispense with it. There must be a reason for the metaphor and the use of this term, rather than say מוֹשָׁב , and the reader today should be confronted with that.⁴

CONCLUSION:

NASB and NKJV are to be preferred.

§ XVI. ZECHARIAH 12:8

HEBREW: וְהָיָה הַנִּכְשָׁל בָּהֶם

⁴ Cf. C. L. Meyers and E. M. Meyers, *Zechariah 9 - 14* (Anchor Bible; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1993), 327-328.

NASB: and the one who is feeble among them

NIV: so that the feeblest among them

NKJV: the one who is feeble among them

COMMENT:

1. NASB is a word for word translation. Both the NIV and NKJV improve on NASB by integrating it syntactically into the English. NIV renders a result clause which is the obvious sense of the passage⁵ and the NKJV drops the Hebrew ׀ and accurately translates by starting a new subdivision (after semi-colon) in the main sentence.

CONCLUSION:

NIV and NKJV are to be preferred.

§ XVII. ZECHARIAH 12:10

HEBREW: ׀הִבִּיטוּ אֵלַי

NASB: so that they will look on Me

NIV: They will look on me

NKJV: then they will look on Me

COMMENT:

1. The Hebrew ׀ is treated differently. (In a sense we have a similar situation as in 12:8. See § XVI above.) NASB integrates the words in question into a longer sentence, accurately rendering the intent of the text. NIV handles the problem by breaking the verse up into two sentences. The NKJV does essentially the same as the NIV but uses a semi-colon followed by “then”.

2. Breaking up long Hebrew sentences held together by *waws* is a common and justifiable practice.

CONCLUSION:

All translations are accurate and one’s preference will depend on one’s choice of English style. The NASB has a rather long sentence in English which the NKJV breaks into two virtually independent clauses. The NIV goes one step further and simply makes two sentences out of

⁵ Cf. B. K. Waltke and M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 527.

it. Since English style is more and more tending to simpler sentences, the NIV is probably the most contemporary here and should thus be preferred.

§ XVIII. ZECHARIAH 12:10

HEBREW: הַיָּחִיד ... הַבְּכוֹר

NASB: an only son...a first born

NIV: an only child...a firstborn son

NKJV: *his* only *son*...a first born

COMMENT:

1. The relative meaningless and confusion regarding the use of italics is again evident. NASB is inconsistent; the NKJV is consistent.
2. הַיָּחִיד and הַבְּכוֹר are parallel. Neither term in itself details the gender, but הַבְּכוֹר in this context can be expected to be male.
3. NASB and NKJV use “son” with the first term. NIV uses “son” with the second term. If one had to choose between these two, the NIV is the more attractive, a climactic parallelism.

CONCLUSION:

The NIV rendering is the most preferable.

§ XIX CAPITALIZATION IN 12:10

DATA

1. NASB and NKJV capitalize רִיחַ , while NIV does not, but notes that possibility in a footnote.
2. NASB and NKJV capitalize all references to the one who is slain and for whom they mourn (three times) because their policy calls for capitalization of all pronominal references to God. NIV capitalizes none of these, as is its policy. regarding pronouns.

COMMENT:

1. With respect to “spirit”, both the view of the NASB and NKJV as well as that of the NIV that “spirit” does or does not refer to God respectively can be defended. The spirit is not specifically identified as the Spirit of the LORD.⁶ One cannot be dogmatic on this point and

⁶ Cf., e.g., J. H. Scheepers, *Die Gees van God en die Gees van die Mens in die Ou Testament* (kampen: Kok, 1960), 108-110 and Meyers and Meyers,

make it a criterion on Bible translations.

2. While the NASB and the NKJV may very well be correct in assuming that the first fulfillment of this prophecy is in the person of our Saviour (and hence the capitalization is justified), still the difficulty with this (excessive) capitalization is that it precludes inquiring whether an earlier fulfillment of this prophecy can be defended. Precluding the posing of such a question is a loss for seeking to understand a prophetic text, given the nature of Old Testament prophecy. On most occasions there is both an immediate and future fulfillment.⁷

CONCLUSION:

The extensive capitalization policy of the NASB and NKJV is to be regretted since it can preclude the asking of necessary questions regarding earlier fulfillments of a prophecy.⁸ The NIV policy on not capitalizing pronominal references to God is preferred.

§ XX. ZECHARIAH 12:12

HEBREW: מִשְׁפָּחוֹת מִשְׁפָּחוֹת לְבָד

NASB: every family by itself

NIV: each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves

NKJV: every family by itself

COMMENT:

1. NASB and NKJV accurately translate the Hebrew.

2. NIV supplies an addition “with their wives by themselves”, apparently to balance with 12:14 where in a more general statement wives are also mentioned. There is however no warrant in the Hebrew text or for the comprehensibility of the passage to add this phrase.

CONCLUSION:

NASB and NKJV are to be preferred for they add no additional material.

B. OBSERVATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Zechariah 9-14, 335-336.

⁷ Cf. regarding the question of a pre-New Testament fulfillment, J. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi* (TOTC; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1972), 193-195; Meyers and Meyers, *Zechariah 9-14*, 338-342

⁸ Cf. the discussion paper “Notes on Style” (1994) prepared within the Committee on Bible Translations which also deals with this issue.

OBSERVATIONS

1. The NASB and the NKJV are the most literal translations, sometimes too literal. The translation is sometimes unclear (as NASB and NKJV at 12:1) with awkward style (as NASB at 12:10). The NIV wins easily as the best for understandability and English style.
2. It was surprising that, in spite of the policy of a literal translation to ensure faithfulness in rendering, both the NASB and NKJV supplied words needlessly at 12:1 and 12:10. Also both NASB and NKJV gave an unnecessary interpretation at 12:2 (NKJV twice). The NKJV also neglected to translate a Hebrew word in 12:2. The NIV supplied words needlessly at 12:10 and 12:12 and left a word untranslated in 12:2 and 12:6. No specific instance of an unnecessary interpretation was given of the NIV. The NIV statistics do not compare unfavourably with those of NASB and NKJV. This fact seems to indicate that the NIV is more literal than it is sometimes given credit for. There is no evidence in this study that the NIV is less faithful than the NASB and NKJV.
3. The policy of supplying italics for words not in the original is a failure. In this one chapter, NASB was inconsistent in 12:6 and 12:10 and NKJV in 12:1. The NIV is not burdened by italics. The excessive capitalization policy of NASB and NKJV also does not enhance these translations (cf. at 12:10).
4. It is to be regretted that NIV adds to the text in 12:12 without any justification from the Hebrew text.
5. Where a preference was given, the NIV was chosen 13 times, NASB 7 times and NKJV 6 times. Problems that were repeated in this chapter are not counted twice (both occasions would have benefited the NIV count.)

CONCLUSION

This is a limited study, but the passage was chosen at random. Judging from reviews on the different translations I would be surprised if the basic contours of this study were not evident in other passages of the Old Testament.

The NIV is easily the best translation of this chapter. This judgement is based on the full range of factors that are involved in a translation and as noted above. It may be useful to mention that it would happen on occasion that my first impression of a NIV translation was negative, but when the material was studied it became increasingly clear that the NIV is a sophisticated and fresh piece of work which uses good linguistic and textual scholarship in presenting a responsible trustworthy translation.

A COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF 1 PETER 1

Verse 1

The NIV has done some innovative things in verse 1. Of a *positive* nature is its decision to repeat the meaning of the word ἐκλεκτοῖς, apparently in order to pick up the thread with κατὰ πρόγνωσιν θεοῦ πατρός at the beginning of verse 2 and to recognize its prominence at the beginning of the sentence (something which is lost in both the NKJV and the NASB which do not pick it up until the beginning of verse 2 and end of verse 1 respectively).

Of a more *questionable* nature is the addition of the words “in the world” along with “strangers”, apparently out of the conviction that παρεπιδήμιος means more than just the usual “strangers” or “sojourners.” The fact that Hebrews 11:13 needs to add the words ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς to the phrase ξένοι καὶ παρεπίδημοι pleads against this translation, as does the addition of the phrase ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ τούτῳ to the words ἐπιδημία τῆς σαρκὸς in 2 Clement 5:5. The meaning seems to be instead that the believers are strangers in Asia Minor specifically rather than in the world generally.

Verse 2

The NIV’s “*through* the sanctifying work of the Spirit” is to be preferred to the very literal NKJV’s “*in* sanctification of the Spirit.” BAG¹ sees it as causal or instrumental use of ἐν.

Verse 3

¹ Bauer-Gingich-Danker, *A Greek English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Second Edition. (Chicago, 1993), p. 260 III, a.

NKJV “has begotten us again” is hardly modern English. NIV and NASB are preferable.

Verse 4

The addition of the italicized “*obtain*” in the NASB is neither necessary or desirable. The NIV’s “into...into...” (or possibly “unto...unto...”) gives a good translation of the original’s “εἰς...εἰς...”.

Verse 5

The NIV’s translation “are shielded” seems attractive initially and is certainly in line with the military language. However, φρουρέω does not have this meaning in either Koine or Classical Greek. Thus the NIV is incorrect here and should read “are guarded.” Had Peter wanted to use the image of a shield, he could and probably would have used the word θυρέω.²

Verses 6, 7, 8, 9.

It should be noted that in Greek these verses make up one long sentence. The NASB is the only translation to retain this punctuation. The NKJV splits it up in verse 8, and the NIV splits it up at the end of verse 6, and at the end of verse 7, making three sentences out of the one. While it is easy to accuse the NIV and the NKJV of not maintaining Peter’s style, a careful reading shows that nothing other than that is really sacrificed. The reader is actually better able to pick up Peter’s emphases and catch the original meaning. Verse 8 is a good example of this; the NIV reads beautifully overagainst the awkwardness of the NKJV and the NASB. It should be remembered as well that today’s English instruction is constantly calling for brevity and pointedness in sentence structure. Even older works speak against the “rambling sentence” and the “run-on sentence” and stress that “A sentence expresses *one complete* thought, in one or more clauses.”³

Verse 9

² Liddell & Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford, 1985, p. 811.

³ D.M. Brown, *A Handbook of Composition*, Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1965, p. 181, cf p. 209-11.

The NKJV's translation of τὸ τέλος τῆς πίστεως as "the end of your faith" is unfortunate. Both the NIV and the NASB are better.

Verse 10 and 11

The NKJV's rendering of this long sentence flows very poorly and is really quite bad English (especially the placing of the "who" in verse 10). The NASB is better, but the NIV certainly deserves laurels here.

Verse 12

On a couple of points the NKJV's English again leaves much to be desired. The translation "they were ministering the things..." may be literal but it is hardly a finished translation. Also, since it is improper to end a sentence with a preposition, the last phrase as well should have been changed from "things which angels desire to look *into*" to "things *into* which angels desire to look."

Verse 13

This verse has some problematic words in it. The traditional expressions "gird your minds," "be sober," either say nothing or the wrong things to the English reader. Thus the NIV is to be commended here. "Prepare your minds for action..." is more appropriate than the literal NKJ "gird up the loins of your mind..."; it is also clearer than the NASB's "gird your minds..." which has lost some of the imagery because of the omission of the word "loins"; since the phrase calls for explanation by the exegete anyway, it is better that the reader initially receive its ultimate meaning as the NIV gives it than remain puzzled, as in the other translations. As Bauer, commenting on ὀσφύς explains: "since the garment was worn ungirded about the house, girding denotes preparation for activity, esp. for a journey."⁴ Likewise, whereas "be sober" causes people today to think of the absence of drunkenness, νήφω actually refers to more than just sobriety (though it sometimes has connotations of that sort in Classical Greek and in 1 Thessalonians 5:6), it refers to much more than that here — a state in which one exercises positive self-control and makes sound judgments. The NASB heads in that direction when it says "keep sober *in spirit*." However, the NIV "be self-controlled" is clearer and to be preferred.

⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 587.

Verse 14

There is a definite problem with the English of the NKJV again as the verse between two semi-colons does not have a main verb. The NASB is “rough” as well with the “addition” of the expression “which were yours.” But the NIV has picked up the meaning of the Greek in smooth, clear English.

Verse 17

It is doubtful whether the NKJV and the NASB’s translation of παροικία as “stay” or “stay *upon earth*” adequately picks up the sense of the Greek word. Neither really carry the connotation of living in a place which is strange or foreign. Bauer’s recommendation would be best: “the time of your stay here in a strange land.” The NIV’s “live your lives as strangers here...” is in that line, although in translation it has lost the idea expressed by χρόνος.

The NIV’s “In reverent fear” seems like a free translation of ἐν φόβῳ, but upon reflection it is good since it indicates what Peter means and the reader might misunderstand, namely, that the fear is not a fear of neighbours or the like but a fear of God.

While shorter sentences are justifiable in English (see above), the English of the NIV would not have suffered if verse 17 had ended with a comma rather than a period.

Verse 18

NIV is to be commended for a good translation of πατροπαραδότου, “handed down from your fathers.” It is much better than the NKJV “received by tradition [!?] from your fathers,” and also to be preferred to the NASB “inherited from your forefathers.”

Verse 22

Upon first glance it appears as if the NIV has unjustifiably added the verb “you have” here: “so that *you have* sincere love for your brothers.” But it is apparent that the translators understand εἰς as referring to “the result of an action or condition *into, to, so that...*” (Bauer, 229 4 e), and that therefore this verb is necessary. That is clearer and stronger than the NASB and the NKJV, and it seems to be correct.

CONCLUSIONS**Laurels**

1. To the NIV for its smooth English throughout the chapter.
2. To the NIV for its handling of the difficulties presented in verse 13.

Darts

1. To the NKJV for its poor English in verses 9, 10 & 11, 12, and 14.
2. To the NIV for translating “are shielded” rather than “are guarded.”

A COMPARISON OF TRANSLATIONS OF LUKE 16: 1 - 13 and JOHN 8: 12 - 20

Verse 1

Ἔλεγεν δὲ καὶ πρὸς τοὺς μαθητάς, Ἄνθρωπός τις ἦν πλούσιος ὃς εἶχεν οἰκονόμον, καὶ οὗτος διεβλήθη αὐτῷ ὡς διασκορπίζων τὰ υπάρχοντα αὐτοῦ.

NASB: Now He was also saying to the disciples, “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and this *steward* was reported to him as squandering his possessions.

NIV: Jesus told his disciples: “There was a rich man whose manager was accused of wasting his possessions.

NKJV: He also said to His disciples “There was a certain rich man who had a steward, and an accusation was brought to him that this man was wasting his goods.

COMMENT:

a) The Greek conjunctions δὲ καί (“and also”) are translated in the NASB as “Now ... also...” The NKJV translates only the second with “also.” The NIV omits both. By doing so the NIV does not show the connection between this parable and what Christ taught in the previous chapter. The NIV appears to take much freedom with omitting conjunctions between sentences. Although the Greek uses many more conjunctions than modern English, omission can happen, as is the case here, at the cost of a translation that renders the original text in its meaning as precise as is possible.

b) The NIV shortens the text by rendering the words “who had a steward; and this man” by two words: “whose manager.” This promotes easy reading in the receptor language, but deviates from the old rule that the translation of God’s Word must be ‘as literal as possible and as free as necessary.’

c) the NIV translation “was accused” is better than the other two, being more literal than the NKJV by using the verb “to accuse,” and more correct than the NASB by translating “accused” rather than “reported.”

Verse 3

εἶπεν δὲ ἐν ἑαυτῷ ὁ οἰκονόμος, Τί ποιήσω, ὅτι ὁ κύριός μου ἀφαιρεῖται τὴν οἰκονομίαν ἀπ’ ἐμοῦ;

NASB: And the steward said to himself, “What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me?”

NIV: What shall I do now? My master is taking away my job.

NKJV: What shall I do? For my master is taking the stewardship away from me.

COMMENT:

a) The NIV’s “now” makes explicit what is implied in the Greek text. The man loses his job in the present situation. One could translate the words of the steward in a more formal equivalent manner: “What shall I do, now that my master is taking my stewardship away from me.” The NASB and the NKJV maintain the formal equivalent translation. The NASB has “since” and consequently a more complex sentence. This is the most literal rendering of the Greek. The NKJV displays more freedom by cutting up the Greek complex sentence into two independent clauses. Therefore, as a literal translation, the NASB is to be preferred. The NIV’s rendering is an effort to present the meaning of the Greek in smooth and easy English.

b) The NIV’s change of “stewardship” or “management” into “job” is a more popular rendering of a meaning of the Greek word. It may prevent repetition but lacks dignity.

Verse 4

ἔγνων τί ποιήσω, ἵνα ὅταν μετασταθῶ ἐκ τῆς οἰκονομίας δέξωνταί με εἰς τοὺς οἴκους αὐτῶν.

NASB: I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the stewardship, they will receive me into their homes.

NIV: I know what I’ll do so that when I lose my job here, people will welcome me into their houses.

NKJV: I have resolved what to do, that when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses.

COMMENT:

a) The NKJV’s “I have resolved,” retains very much the KJV, and intends to do justice to the Greek tense. However, A.T. Robertson (*A Grammar of the Greek New Testament in the Light of Historical Research*, Nashville: Broadman, p.842) shows that the present tense of ‘to know’ in English, as in both the NASB and the NIV, is the correct translation.

b) The NASB translates literally: “when I am removed from the stewardship.” The Greek verb means “to remove from (one place to another).” The NIV again replaces the Greek word “stewardship” or “management” with “job.” In this way it presents a more idiomatic and colloquial rendering with its “when I lose my job.” Rather than being as literal as possible, the NIV increases the readability in English.

c) The NIV renders the Greek impersonal “they” with “people.” This is not as literal as the “they” of the NASB and the NKJV, but can be seen as an improvement over these translations in this case since “people” maintains the impersonal aspect.

Verses 6 and 7

16:6 ... Ἐκατὸν βάτους ἐλαίου ... πενήκοντα.

16:7 ... Ἐκατὸν κόρους σίτου ... ὀγδοήκοντα.

NASB: ...hundred measures of oil...hundred measures of wheat...

NIV: ...eight hundred gallons...a thousand bushels...

NKJV: ...a hundred measures...a hundred measures

COMMENT:

The Greek text in vs. 6 speaks of “a hundred baths of olive oil” and in vs.7 of “a hundred cors of wheat.” The NKJV translates “a hundred measures of oil” and “a hundred measures of wheat,” and does not add any explanatory note. The NASB presents the same translation as the NKJV but gives in a note the two different Greek words “bath” and “cor” as well as the measures they represent in gallons and bushels. The NIV translates “eight hundred gallons of olive oil” as well as “a thousand bushels of wheat.” Since it is preferable to give the Greek words “bath” and “cor” in an explanatory note, the translation of the NIV is clear and is better than the unknown “measures” of both the NASB and the NKJV.

Verse 9

Καὶ ἐγὼ ὑμῖν λέγω, ἑαυτοῖς ποιήσατε φίλους ἐκ τοῦ μαμωνᾶ τῆς ἀδικίας, ἵνα ὅταν ἐκλίπη δέξωνται ὑμᾶς εἰς τὰς αἰωνίους σκηνάς.

NASB: And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the Mammon of unrighteousness: that when it fails, they may receive you into the eternal dwellings.

NIV: I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings.

NKJV: And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon, that when you fail, they may receive you into an everlasting home.

COMMENT:

a) The word “Mammon” occurs four times in the N.T., three times in this passage (the vss. 9, 11, and 13) and once in Matthew 6:24, where the sentence is identical with that in our vs. 13, although the context is different. In the latter two texts “Mammon” is set in contrast with God: “You cannot serve God and Mammon.” “Mammon” is personified here and presented as an idol. “Mammon” “is the normal word for ‘money,’ ‘wealth,’ in Mishnaic Hebrew [and in Aramaic], and is also attested in

that sense several times in documents from Qumran” and it “is not inherently evil” (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol.4, 1992, p.490). In the verses 9 and 11 it is connected with a qualifying noun and adjective, respectively, both expressing unrighteousness. With the translation “Mammon of unrighteousness” in vs. 9, the NASB renders the Greek phrase literally. The NKJV renders the Greek qualifier “of unrighteousness” here with the adjective “unrighteous” as in vs.11, where also the Greek original and the NASB have the same: “unrighteous Mammon” (only the NASB has the capital). The translation with the adjective is correct and smoother. The NIV does not maintain the Hebrew word as the Greek does, but translates it with “wealth.” The NIV’s translation cannot be considered wrong; it makes the meaning directly clear to the modern reader, although one can regret the loss of the Hebrew word. It is regrettable that the NIV translates “mammon” with “wealth” in vss. 9 and 11 but with “Money” in vs. 13, since now the English reader does not see that three times the same word is used. Further, the rendering of “unrighteous” with worldly does not increase the clarity. As such the word “worldly” does not express the “unrighteousness” or injustice which people often do to each other because of money or wealth.

b) The NKJV’s “when you fail” is based on the 2nd person plural reading of the Textus Receptus, based on only a part of the Byzantine MSS; the 3rd person singular reading is based on the the great majority of MSS including the other part of the Byzantine MSS; therefore, this latter reading should be followed. The NKJV, however, sticks to the KJV. The verb is used as Greek translation in the Septuagint of a Hebrew verb (גָּרַע) which means “to expire, to breathe out one’s life” (Gesenius) and is found with this meaning in Gen. 25:8 of Abraham who “breathed his last and died” (see also Gen.25:17 for Ishmaël, and 35:29 for Isaac). The translation of NASB and NIV is based on the Greek reading of the singular in the 3rd person referring to Mammon or Money: “when it fails” or “comes to an end.” The NIV’s translation “when it is gone” is more popular and appears in this context to be incorrect, for in the context the person is received in the heavenly dwellings. This points to his death. In his death money fails him; it is a qualified “coming to an end,” namely, of being of any benefit for him. Therefore, the NASB translation is to be preferred.

c) The NASB’s “... they may receive you in the eternal dwellings” is literal and better than the NKJV’s “they may receive you in to an everlasting home.” For the Greek text has the definite article and uses the word “tents” or “dwellings” in the plural. The NIV’s translation with the passive form “that ... you may be welcomed” is not wrong, see *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament* (p.72, § 130) by F. Blass & A. Debrunner (with R. W. Funk) which points out that the 3rd person plural form of a verb without expressed subject can be impersonal and mean “one” or “people.”

JOHN 8:12-20**Verse 13**

εἶπον οὖν αὐτῷ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι, Σὺ περὶ σεαυτοῦ μαρτυρεῖς· ἡ μαρτυρία σου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀληθής.

NASB: The Pharisees therefore said to Him, "You are bearing witness of Yourself; Your testimony is not true."

NIV: The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

NKJV: The Pharisees said to Him, "You bear witness of Yourself; Your witness is not true."

COMMENT:

a) Bauer (*A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Chicago: University Press, 1979, p.469) gives several meanings of the very common Greek verb for "saying" used here, under the heading of "the specific sense" and the sub-heading: "special forms." As such a "specific sense" he mentions "ask," "answer," "order, command, direct, enjoin, recommend," "assure, assert," "maintain, declare, proclaim," "speak, report, tell." The basic sense is that of saying. In spite of these specific senses of the Greek verb, the NIV's rendering of "said" with "challenged" would appear unnecessary here. The reader himself can interpret this "said" as a challenge.

b) The NIV's "Here you are, appearing as..." intends to show in the translation that the "You" in the Greek original has emphasis, but the manner in which this is done appears too free and overdone. The same emphasis is present in the vs. 14 ("I" and "you"), vs. 15 ("you" and "I"), vs. 16 ("I), etc. Moreover, the Greek text makes use of the verb "to testify" and not of the phrase "appearing as witness." There appears to be no need for such an extensive circumscription.

c) In this passage there are two possibilities with respect to the translation. The translation "appearing as your own witness" in the NIV is linked to the word "valid" at the end of this verse. While the NASB, as the NKJV, retains the translation "true," it gives "valid" as possible translation in a note in the margin. The meaning of the Greek word is "truthful, righteous, honest" with regard to persons, and "true" and "dependable" with respect to things (Bauer) or "true, real, honest" and "genuine" (J.P.Louw & E.A.Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Based on Semantic Domains*, 1 & 2, New York: United Bible Societies, vol.2, p.10). The NIV translation "valid" appears to be based on the practice in the Jewish court that the testimony of one witness was not acceptable or valid. Its background is Deut. 19:15 and 17:6. The Lord Himself refers to it in John 8:17. This means that the validity of Christ's witness about Himself is one aspect in this passage.

The other aspect of the truthfulness of our Lord's testimony about Himself is certainly not less present. In vs. 13 we have a reaction to Christ's word in vs. 12. Here He says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me ... shall have the light of life." In reaction to this the Pharisees reply: "You bear witness of yourself." Now the Greek text says here: "about yourself" and not "by yourself" or "alone." Also in vs. 14, in the Lord's reaction, He says that even though He testifies *about* Himself, that His testimony is true because He knows where He comes from and where He goes. This knowledge of who He is and what He is refers therefore more to the true contents of His testimony than to its validity. The translation of the NASB and NKJV is to be preferred because it gives both possibilities.

Verse 14

ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς καὶ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς, Καὶ ἐγὼ μαρτυρῶ περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ, ἀληθὴς ἐστὶν ἡ μαρτυρία μου, ὅτι οἶδα πόθεν ἦλθον καὶ ποῦ ὑπάγω· ὑμεῖς δὲ οὐκ οἴδατε πόθεν ἔρχομαι ἢ ποῦ ὑπάγω.

NASB: Jesus answered and said to them "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true; for I know where I came from, and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going."

NIV: Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going."

NKJV: Jesus answered and said to them, "Even if I bear witness of Myself, My witness is true, for I know where I came from and where I am going; but you do not know where I come from and where I am going."

COMMENT:

a) The NIV leaves out the words "and he said to them" (as does the RSV). The NASB and NKJV retain them. According to many scholars the participle "saying" after a "He answered" is taken over from the Hebrew O.T., functioning as a colon, and therefore is to be omitted in the translation. While the NIV could have retained the "to them," it cannot be blamed for this omission.

b) The NIV's and the NASB's "or" in the concluding clause follows one part of the Greek manuscripts. The NKJV (as the KJV) has "and," following the larger part (Majority Text and one papyrus) of the manuscripts. The meaning of the text does not change.

Verse 15

ὑμεῖς κατὰ τὴν σάρκα κρίνετε, ἐγὼ οὐ κρίνω οὐδένα.

NASB: You people judge according to the flesh, I am not judging any one.

NIV: You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.

NKJV: You judge according to the flesh; I judge no one.

COMMENT:

a) The NIV's rendering of the Greek "according to the flesh" with "by human standards" functions as explanation of the term "flesh." It is doubtful whether rendering "flesh" by "human standards" truly clarifies the meaning. The word "flesh" implies here sinfulness, unbelief. Christ is referring more to the sinful way in which they judge than to the standards by which they judge. The term "human standards" needs an explanation as much as the term "flesh." Besides, "flesh" is a well-known biblical and confessional term. Retaining it prevents impoverishment of our biblical and ecclesiastical vocabulary. However, it must be acknowledged that the NIV rendering is also found in one of the standard Greek-English dictionaries: W. Bauer's *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (2nd ed., ET and rev. by W.F. Arndt & F.W. Gingrich, Chicago: Univ. Press, p.744, sub 6).

b) The NASB's adds to "you" the word "people" most likely to show the emphasis present in the Greek original, but the rendering does not sound as dignified as a word of our Lord should.

Verse 16

καὶ ἂν κρίνω δὲ ἐγὼ, ἢ κρίσις ἢ ἐμὴ ἀληθινὴ ἐστίν, ὅτι μόνος οὐκ εἰμί, ἀλλ' ἐγὼ καὶ ὁ πέμψας με πατήρ.

NASB: But even if I do judge, My judgment is true, for I am not alone *in it*, but I and He who sent Me."

NIV: But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

NKJV: And yet if I do judge, My judgment is true: for I am not alone, but I *am* with the Father who sent Me.

COMMENT:

In the main clause, the NIV renders the Greek word translated in NASB and NKJV by "judgment" with "decisions." As the verb "to judge" and the noun "judgment" are related in English, so are the Greek verb *krino* and its noun *krisis*. The translation "decisions" instead of "judgment" makes it impossible for the English reader to recognize the cognate link between the verb and the noun in the original Greek text, while the translation "decisions" is not necessary to clarify the Greek word. The NIV's translation "right" instead of "true" eliminates the means whereby the English reader can immediately see that here the same word "true" is used as in the vss. 13 and 14 and again in vs. 17 (where the NIV has "valid"); see further the comment ad vs.13.

Verse 17

καὶ ἐν τῷ νόμῳ δὲ τῷ ὑμετέρῳ γέγραπται ὅτι δύο ἀνθρώπων ἡ μαρτυρία ἀληθής ἐστίν.

NASB: In your law it is written that the testimony of two men is true;

NIV: In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.

NKJV: It is also written in your law that the testimony of two men is true.

COMMENT:

The NIV's "your own Law" is a good translation since the Greek uses the emphatic 'restrictive attributive' construction: "in the Law that is yours." For the NIV's "valid" (in the margin as note in the NASB), see ad vss. 13 and 16.

Verse 19

ἔλεγον οὖν αὐτῷ, Ποῦ ἐστὶν ὁ πατήρ σου; ἀπεκρίθη Ἰησοῦς, Οὔτε ἐμὲ οἴδατε οὔτε τὸν πατέρα μου· εἰ ἐμὲ ᾔδειτε, καὶ τὸν πατέρα μου ἄν ᾔδειτε.

NASB: And so they were saying to Him 'Where is Your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me, nor my Father; if you knew Me, you would know My Father also.'

NIV: Then they asked him, 'Where is your father?' 'You do not know me or My Father,' Jesus replied. 'If you knew me, you would know my Father also.'

NKJV: Then they said to Him, 'Where is your Father?' Jesus answered, 'You know neither Me nor my Father. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also.'

COMMENT:

The best translation of the first line would be a literal "They, then, said to Him." The NASB tries to do justice to the Greek imperfect expressing continuous action; it also renders the weak Greek conjunction *oun* with "and so." Both renderings make the translation less smooth. The NIV renders "said" of the Greek text with an unnecessary "asked." The NKJV is incorrect when it translates the verbs in the last sentence with "had known" and "would have known" (as in the KJV). The perfect form of the verb has a present meaning.

Verse 20

Ταῦτα τὰ ῥήματα ἐλάλησεν ἐν τῷ γαζοφυλακίῳ διδάσκων ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ· καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐπίασεν αὐτόν, ὅτι οὐπω ἐληλύθει ἡ ὥρα αὐτοῦ.

NASB: These words He spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one seized Him, because His hour had not yet come.

NIV: He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

NKJV: These words Jesus spoke in the treasury, as He taught in the temple; and no one laid hands on Him, for His hour had not yet come.

COMMENT:

a) The NIV's descriptive paraphrase for "treasury" is clearer and acceptable. But the place of this translation after the clause "while teaching in the temple area" gives the impression that the phrase "near the place where the offerings are put" is linked to the participle "teaching" with its locality "the temple area" and serves as a more specific indication of this locality. The Greek text connects Christ's speaking with the treasury and His teaching with the temple. Even though one can say that this does not make much difference in meaning, the change seems to show a freedom with the original text for the sake of the easiness of the English translation.

b) The NIV translates the Greek *ἱερόν* (*hiëron*) with "temple area" instead of simply "temple" as in the NASB and the NKJV. The Greek *ναός* (*naös*) is the word for the temple building itself, while the word used here (*hiëron*, 'the holy place') indicates the whole temple precinct including the courts and other buildings. The translation "temple area," therefore, is good.

EVALUATION

In a number of cases the NKJV abides by the wrong translation of the KJV (Luke 16: vs.4: "resolved"; vs.9: "it fails"; John 8: vs.19: "had / would have known.") In Luke 16:1 the NIV and NASB are better than the NKJV's "brought in accusation." The same counts for vs.4 with "measurements." In other cases the NKJV and the NASB are better than the NIV because they are more literal.

The NASB is not as good as the others in John 8:15 (people) and vs.19 ("And so they were saying"), but is better than the NIV (property) and the NKJV (another man's) in Luke 16:9.

The NIV is sometimes free at the cost of being exact, as in Luke 16:1,4 with the omission of conjunctions, in 16:4 with "job" and in vs.9, 11, 13 with "mammon," and vs. 12 with "property of your own." In John 8:13 ("challenged him,'Here you are, appearing..."), in vs.15 ("human standards"), and vs.16 ("decisions,"), the NIV appears more free than necessary. On the other hand, the NIV presents an improvement in translation in Luke 16:1 with "accused", in vs.6 where it renders the measures in English equivalents, and in vs.17 ("your own law") and in vs.20 with ("temple area").

CONCLUSION

The NASB and the NKJV are more exact in some cases than the NIV as the method of the latter uses more freedom to reach a simple and more idiomatic English. The NKJV's translation, poor in some cases due to its determination to cling to the KJV, is not better than the NASB. The literalness of the NASB has also resulted in a translation which on many occasions is not as smooth nor as easy to read as one would wish.