

APPENDIX III

COMMITTEE FOR BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

Committee on Bible Translations *Report to Synod Abbotsford 1995*

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

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.

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 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 Text*⁴ of the New Testament, or (b) the eclectic text often referred to with the names Nestle-Aland. While the

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

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.

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 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

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 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.

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

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

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

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

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 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

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

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.

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.

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

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 Church of Australia*, 140). The translation used here and in what follows is theirs.

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.

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 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

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."

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.

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

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* 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

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

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).

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 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

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.

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....

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.

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.

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

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 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

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

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.

²⁷ Appendix 3, § 4. vi.

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

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

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.

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 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

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.

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.

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 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 *Commā Johanneum* (1 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

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.

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

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 1 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 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

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

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. 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

³⁹ *Acts Synod Lincoln 1992, 252.*

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 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.

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.

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

Included in our mandate is also point two:

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

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 Bedforddale 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 Bedforddale 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

⁴⁵ J. P. Lewis, *Op.cit.*, 329.

consideration to its method of translating, the deputies recommended to synod 1990

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.

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

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 OT.

Since our Synod 1992 gave us the mandate to give due consideration to Synod Bedforddale 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 Bedforddale 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.)

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.

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 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,

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

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. 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.

⁵³ *Report to Synod 1994, 19-20.*

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.
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

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

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.

Committee on Bible Translations

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,
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J. Geertsema
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