

**TODAY'S NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION:  
THE UNTOLD STORY OF A GOOD TRANSLATION<sup>1</sup>**

by  
Craig L. Blomberg  
Distinguished Professor of New Testament, Denver Seminary

In the spring of 2002, Zondervan and the International Bible Society released the latest work of the ongoing Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), *Today's New International Version* (TNIV) of the New Testament. The Old Testament is slated for release in 2005. Approximately 7% of the text is changed from the last American revision of the NIV, published in 1984. A little less than 30% of these changes involve inclusive language for humanity—using “brothers and sisters” for “brothers” when a mixed audience is clearly meant by the biblical terms, or “human beings” for “men” or shifting to a third-person plural or a second-person pronoun to avoid a generic “he,” and so on.<sup>2</sup> To date, virtually no notice has been paid to the majority of the changes, which are unrelated to gender-inclusive language, while much more heat than light has been generated in controversy over the gender-inclusive language.

A large part of the debate stems from other recent developments in the Bible publishing industry. In 1996, Hodder and Stoughton, whose international headquarters are in London, released what became known as the NIVI—the *New International Version, Inclusive Language Edition*, which consistently employed inclusive language for humanity when the biblical words and contexts justified it. At that time IBS and Zondervan were considering whether or not to publish the NIVI in the United States as well. In early 1997, however, a firestorm of protest spearheaded by *World* magazine, theology professor Wayne Grudem, Focus on the Family and key leaders in the Southern Baptist Convention, proved to be a highly influential factor in a decision not to release the NIVI in the American market. It has, however, continued to be available throughout the rest of the English-speaking world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A revised, abbreviated version of this paper will be delivered at the fourth annual Contextualized Biblical Studies conference (this year on Bible translation) at Denver Seminary, Jan. 31-Feb. 1, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> The dates and statistics come from “Today’s New International Version (TNIV) Fact Sheet,” from the TNIV website: <http://www.tniv.info/quickfacts.php>.

<sup>3</sup> For a helpful overview of events, see D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker; Leicester: IVP, 1998), 15-38.

A number of leaders of the protest against the NIVI met at Focus on the Family in 1997 and produced what has come to be called the Colorado Springs Guidelines (CSG) for translation, which severely limit the number of contexts in which inclusive language can be used to refer to human beings.<sup>4</sup> Two members of the CBT as well as the presidents of Zondervan and IBS participated in these discussions and signed a document that included the wording, “We therefore agree to the attached guidelines for translation of gender-related language in Scripture.”<sup>5</sup> The opponents of the NIVI believed that they had elicited a promise that the NIV would not be further revised, except in keeping with the new guidelines. The CBT never understood themselves to be bound by what their two members signed, since they had never authorized them to participate in the conversations. While Zondervan’s president signed the guidelines, he believed he made it clear to the other participants that Zondervan would not be governed by the CSG in its publication of Bibles and that Zondervan would continue to publish at least the inclusive language Bibles it already carried in its Bible line. IBS apparently did endorse the guidelines but later decided they could not in good conscience continue to live by the restrictive nature of those guidelines.<sup>6</sup> Whatever the precise nuances of each party’s understanding, there should be no surprise that there is today a fair amount of mistrust and sense of betrayal among participants on both sides of the debate. Unfortunately, this difference in interpretation of commitments also accounts for a large amount of the emotion surrounding the current controversy.

In between the NIVI and the TNIV, three important books appeared discussing the inclusive-language debate. D. A. Carson and Mark Strauss, staunch evangelical New Testament professors at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and Bethel Seminary West, respectively, and both complementarians on the gender roles debate, published entire books in general commending the move to translations that used inclusive-language for humanity like the NIVI, explaining in detail the translation theory behind such efforts and

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<sup>4</sup> For the specific guidelines, see Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000), 299-319.

<sup>5</sup> “Statement by Participants in the Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture” (Colorado Springs: Focus on the Family, May 27, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Each of the last four sentences reflects direct statements made to me in 2002 by high-level executives from the various organizations that were involved. I have deliberately phrased them as perceptions, since I am obviously not in a position to determine what was actually said behind closed doors.

countering numerous misunderstandings and misrepresentations of the process.<sup>7</sup> In turn, Wayne Grudem, then also at Trinity, now at Phoenix Seminary, along with Westminster Theological Seminary New Testament professor Vern Poythress, replied in a book whose subtitle well captured their concerns: “Muting the Masculinity of God's Words.”<sup>8</sup>

In light of all this background, no one should be surprised to see the controversy continue to rage after the appearance of the TNIV's New Testament. *World* magazine, Focus on the Family, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW, which Grudem helped found) and the Southern Baptist leadership have again issued strong protests.<sup>9</sup> An advertisement has circulated with the signatures of 100 well-known, largely American Christian leaders condemning the new translation, though few are bona fide New Testament scholars.<sup>10</sup> On the other side, careful studies by New Testament scholars like Carson, Strauss, Darrell Bock from Dallas Seminary, and Jon Weatherly from Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary have once again shown that much of the criticism is misguided.<sup>11</sup> And the TNIV website has its own impressive list of endorsements, with explanatory blurbs from highly respected evangelical biblical scholars and other Christian leaders.<sup>12</sup>

Unfortunately, the new translation's critics have so politicized the issue, convincing bookstore owners not to carry the translation and persuading entire

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<sup>7</sup> D. A. Carson, *Inclusive-Language Debate*; Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1998).

<sup>8</sup> Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*.

<sup>9</sup> See, respectively, Susan Olasky, “Five Days Early, Five Years Late,” *World* (Feb. 23, 2002): 18-24; James C. Dobson, “‘Today’s New International Version (TNIV)’ of the Bible” (Feb. 6, 2002), <http://www.family.org/welcome/press/10019505/html>; “Translation Inaccuracies in the TNIV: A Categorized List of 904 Examples,” [http://www.cbmw.org/resources/tniv/categorized\\_list.html](http://www.cbmw.org/resources/tniv/categorized_list.html) (not one of the verses is inaccurate; they merely reflect passages where CBMW disagrees with the translation criteria used by the CBT); Eric Reed, “Southern Baptists Blast TNIV,” *Christianity Today* (Aug. 5, 2002): 17.

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.no-tniv.com/statement.html>. Approximately ten percent are fully credentialed New Testament scholars.

<sup>11</sup> The first three have been disseminated via the web, but I am not aware that they are yet in published form. See D. A. Carson, “The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation—And Other Limits, Too” (to be published in the *Festschrift* for Ronald Youngblood); Mark L. Strauss, “Examples of Improvement in Accuracy of the TNIV Over the NIV *When Following the Colorado Springs Guidelines*,” Darrell L. Bock, “Do Gender-sensitive Translations Distort Scripture? Not Necessarily.” For similar but shorter studies, see also the TNIV website at <http://www.tniv.info/updates.php>. Jon Weatherly (“The TNIV: Terrible, Nefarious, Insidious Version?” *Christian Standard* [June 16, 2002]) has his article available at this same website.

<sup>12</sup> “Independent Reviews of the TNIV,” <http://www.tniv.info/endorsements.php>.

denominations to issue statements against it,<sup>13</sup> that the average churchgoer simply has little access to accurate information about the TNIV. On the one hand, the statement criticizing the translation claims that “the TNIV has gone beyond acceptable translation standards in several important respects.” Conversely, the Forum of Bible Agencies, which represents roughly 90% of all contemporary Bible translation work, has gone on record stating that the TNIV “falls within the forum’s translation principles and procedures.”<sup>14</sup> Who is a person to believe? And one wonders how many of the high profile signatories critical of the TNIV have actually had the time to read substantial portions of the New Testament in the new translation. In a busy world, it is often easiest just to trust a respected friend and scholar, do a little bit of first-hand examination, and come to a conclusion. On the other hand, *I have read every word of the TNIV, rereading my old NIV at the same time, noting and evaluating every change in light of the UBS Greek New Testament*, so that the generalizations that I make may be as accurate as possible.

The purpose of my paper, then, is threefold. First, I wish to point out some *enormous improvements* that the TNIV has made over the previous editions of the NIV in areas unrelated to gender-inclusive language. Second, I wish to respond to some of the *most persistent and misguided* charges against the TNIV with respect to gender-inclusive language. Finally, I wish to highlight the fact that the most prominent forms of gender-inclusive language changes in the TNIV that “violate” the CSG are forms of translation *found within the New Testament itself*, so that those who support the CSG, however unwittingly, are therefore impugning the very patterns God adopted in inspiring his Scriptures.

### Crucial Translational Improvements

In “A Word to the Reader,” the preface to the TNIV, the CBT itemizes several consistent changes it has made from the NIV: language has been updated when it no longer reflects common, current American English, “the Christ” has regularly been rendered as “the Messiah,” “saints” has usually been replaced with a less misleading term such as “God’s people” or “believers,” the vocative “O” has been eliminated as archaic,

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<sup>13</sup> Most notably the Southern Baptist Convention (and all their LifeWay bookstores) and the Presbyterian Church in America.

<sup>14</sup> See Reed, “Southern Baptists Blast TNIV,” 17.

and entire verses that reflect later textual variants that were almost certainly not what the inspired writers originally wrote are eliminated, with superscripts containing their old verse numbers put in brackets next to the numbers of the preceding verses. Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11, the (only) two long textual variants most likely not in the original autographs, are still printed in the text but in a much smaller font and introduced with bracketed annotations reflecting their later pedigree.<sup>15</sup> In general, footnotes that reflected alternate translations or textual variants have been re-evaluated, and a small number have been changed either to offer new information not previously given or to delete alternatives not deemed as significant. In general, too, the TNIV continues the NIV's policy, established from its inception, of seeking a balance between highly literal and highly fluent translations or, put more technically, between formal and functional equivalence.<sup>16</sup> *Non-gender-related revisions, however, move from a less literal to a more literal rendering of the Greek approximately three times as often as the reverse.*

A careful reading of the text discloses other relatively consistent changes: “truly I tell you” becomes “I tell you the truth”; “fellow workers” becomes “coworkers”; “Jews,” particularly in John's Gospel, often becomes “Jewish leaders” when the context makes it clear that is how the word is being used;<sup>17</sup> and “miracles,” especially in John, become the more literal “signs,” “miraculous signs,” or “works.” The word for “spirit,” where there is a good chance it means the Holy Spirit, particularly in Paul, is now capitalized, “Peter” is rendered “Cephas” when the Greek merely transliterates that Hebrew name, and the hours of the day (e.g., first or tenth) are given as modern equivalents (“six in the morning,” “four in the afternoon”).

In addition to these predictable changes, there are a host of texts where the NIV was either unnecessarily ambiguous or actually misleading that the TNIV has corrected. I list the ones that most caught my eye in canonical sequence.

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<sup>15</sup> *TNIV: New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), v-vii.

<sup>16</sup> I will use the term “literal” throughout this paper, despite its drawbacks, because of its common use. I will use it as a synonym for “formally equivalent.”

<sup>17</sup> This change has come under fire, but consult virtually any recent evangelical commentary on John for justification that *Ioudaioi* has become a quasi-technical term in many contexts in the Fourth Gospel meaning precisely this. Cf. also esp. Stephen Motyer, *Your Father the Devil: A New Approach to John and the Jews* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

Matt. 1:16—The feminine relative pronoun *hēs*, that makes it clear that Jesus was born only of Mary and not also of Joseph, obscured in “of whom was born Jesus,” has now been clarified: “Mary was the mother of Jesus. . .”

Matt. 11:12—The rare words previously rendered “forcefully advancing” (*biazetai*), “forceful men” (*biastai*) and “lay hold of” (*harpazousin*) much more likely have the negative connotations now given them with “subjected to violence,” “violent people,” and “have been raiding.”<sup>18</sup>

Matt. 27:38, 44 (cf. Mark 15:27)—The term used of the two men crucified with Christ (from *lēstēs*) describes insurrectionists not common thieves. Thus “robbers” becomes the much better “rebels.”

Matt. 27:52-53—The text is now correctly punctuated to avoid the idea that those raised with Christ actually preceded him out of the tombs, which of course would violate 1 Cor. 15:20 in which Christ is the “firstfruits” of all who will be resurrected.<sup>19</sup>

Luke 1:15—The text literally states that John the Baptist will be filled with the Spirit “yet from his mother's womb.” This was acknowledged in the previous NIV footnote, but the text read merely “even from birth.” The TNIV has improved that to “even before he is born.”

Luke 2:7—It has often been pointed out that the famous “inn” (*kataluma*) in which there was no room for Joseph's family should probably be translated “guest room,”<sup>20</sup> and now it is.

Luke 11:41—The almost unintelligible “But give what is inside [the dish],” in the context of Jesus' teaching on ritual purity, has become the more accurate, “But now as for what is inside you—be generous. . .”

Luke 17:21—It is highly unlikely that Jesus would ever have said to his opponents among the Jewish leaders that the kingdom of God was “within” (*entos*) them. This reading is now relegated to a footnote, whereas an equivalent to the former footnote (“Or *among*”) is now the preferred reading—the kingdom is “in your midst.”

Luke 18:11—The prepositional phrase describing the posture of the Pharisee (*pros heauton*) in Jesus' parable more likely modifies “stood” than “prayed” and thus is

<sup>18</sup> See, e.g., Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word, 1993), 306-7.

<sup>19</sup> See esp. John W. Wenham, “When Were the Saints Raised?” *JTS* 32 (1981): 150-52.

<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1-9:50* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 208.

better rendered “by himself” (TNIV) than “about” or “to” himself (NIV, NIV mg, respectively).

John 1:16—The text literally speaks of “grace instead of grace” in comparing the giving of the Law through Moses with the coming of the Gospel through Jesus Christ. This is far better captured by the TNIV’s “out of his fullness we have all received grace in place of grace already given” than by the NIV’s “from the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.”<sup>21</sup>

Rom. 3:25—This key text about the nature of salvation almost certainly presents three parallel prepositional phrases all modifying the verb “presented”—God presented Christ as a propitiation (1) through faith, (2) by his blood, and (3) for a demonstration of his righteousness. The NIV made it sound like one exercised “faith in his blood,” while the TNIV now clarifies: “through the shedding of blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate. . .”

Rom. 16:2—There is widespread agreement that the controversial noun *prostatis* here refers to Phoebe functioning as a patron or financial supporter of Paul.<sup>22</sup> This is now well captured by the TNIV’s “benefactor,” whereas the NIV simply called her “a great help.”

1 Cor. 6:4—It is unlikely that Paul would have commanded the Corinthians to “appoint as judges even men of little account in the church,” even as an ironic comment that the least competent Christian was a better judge than a secular counterpart. Rather, he most likely meant to ask the question, “do you ask for a ruling from those whose way of life is scorned in the church?” as a rebuke to those who were taking before the secular courts Christian business that should have been resolved within the church.<sup>23</sup>

1 Cor. 7:1—It is widely agreed that the literal translation here, “It is good for a man not to touch a woman,” refers euphemistically to “sexual relations” (not just in marriage) and is Paul’s quotation of a Corinthian slogan promoting total celibacy for all

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<sup>21</sup> See esp. “*χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος* (John 1.16): Grace and the Law in the Johannine Prologue,” *JSNT* 32 (1988): 3-15.

<sup>22</sup> See, e.g., Thomas L. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 788.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2000), 433.

believers.<sup>24</sup> The NIV indicated this in a footnote; it has now rightly been introduced into the text itself.

2 Cor. 1:23—Curiously, the NIV left one small clause entirely untranslated (*epi tēn emēn psychēn*), which the TNIV has restored: “and I stake my life on it.”

2 Cor. 3:13—This very tortuous Greek construction has been shown most likely not to refer so much to the fading glory on Moses' face, as in v. 7, as to the entire Mosaic covenant. This is much more clearly reflected not with the old rendering “to keep the Israelites from gazing at it while the radiance was fading away,” but with the new, more literal translation “to prevent the Israelites from seeing the end of what was passing away.”<sup>25</sup>

Phil. 2:4—The change may seem minor but it is highly significant. To capture the full force of Paul's statement we must not add the words “only” and “also” where the Greek does not contain them but translate literally, “not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”<sup>26</sup>

Phil. 3:6—“Legalistic righteousness” was a very unfortunate rendering that did not reflect a uniform Jewish approach to the Law, or a literal translation. “Righteousness based on the law” is much better and more literal.<sup>27</sup>

Phil. 4:13—Out of context, “I can do everything through him who gives me strength,” has been widely abused by Christians who felt it was a mandate to do things to which they had not been called and for which they had not been gifted. In context, of course, it refers simply to being content and coping in any and every socio-economic context. This is now clarified with “I can do all this.”

1 Tim. 1:10—“Adulterers” (those cheating on their spouses) was too narrow a translation of the word (*pornoi*) that means those who commit sexual immorality of any

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<sup>24</sup> See esp. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 275-76.

<sup>25</sup> See esp. Linda L. Belleville, *Reflections of Glory: Paul's Polemical Use of the Moses-Doxa Tradition in 2 Cor. 3* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 295.

<sup>26</sup> See esp. Markus Bockmuehl, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 113-14.

<sup>27</sup> This is not to adopt uncritically the “new perspective” on Paul but merely to acknowledge what is now generally agreed on even by the critics of the new perspective. See esp. D. A. Carson, Peter T. O'Brien and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism*, vol. 1 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).



kind; “perverts” was far too broad a term for a word that Paul apparently coined to mean those practicing homosexuality (*arsenokoitai*; etymologically, coitus with a male).<sup>28</sup>

Phm. 6—Here is one of the most important changes of all. The NIV led many zealous evangelists astray with its translation, “I pray that you may be active in *sharing your faith*, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.” But the Greek of the italicized words reads merely, “the fellowship of your faith” (*hē koinōnia tēs pisteōs sou*), and parallel constructions in Paul almost always reflect subjective not objective genitives. The little letter to Philemon is not about evangelism at all, but entirely about Paul's hope that Philemon will welcome Onesimus back home in keeping with his reputation for hospitality. Thus the TNIV's, “I pray that your *partnership with us in the faith* may be effective in deepening your understanding of every good thing we share for the sake of Christ” is far better.<sup>29</sup>

Jas. 4:5—There are at least three main ways to render this difficult sentence intelligibly. But the NIV chose the least likely of the three (“that the spirit he caused to live in us tends toward envy”), with the other two put in a footnote; now the TNIV presents the most likely (“he jealously longs for the spirit he has caused to dwell in us”), while still preserving the others in the margin.<sup>30</sup>

#### Other Important Translational Changes

The boundaries between what belongs in the previous section and what falls under this heading are admittedly fluid. But I offer here additional examples of significant improvements from the NIV to the TNIV, though perhaps not quite as crucial as the corrections just noted.

Matt. 2:2, 9—It has always been odd to read that the wise men saw the star “in the east” but then traveled to the west! This can be resolved by saying that “in the east” described where the wise men were when they saw the star, not where the star was when they saw it. But it is better still, with the TNIV, to recognize the expression *en tē anatolē*, because of the *sun's* rising in the east, as equivalent to “when it rose,” irrespective of the star's location in the heavens.

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<sup>28</sup> See esp. David F. Wright, “Homosexuals or Prostitutes? The Meaning of *Arsenokoitai* (1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:10),” *VC* 38 (1984): 125-53.

<sup>29</sup> See, e.g., Richard R. Melick, Jr., *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon* (Nashville: Broadman, 1991), 354.

<sup>30</sup> See, e.g., Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 164.

Matt. 6:22-23 (cf. Luke 11:34)—the Greek words are too specific for the NIV's very general “good” (*haplous*) and “bad” (*poneros*). “Healthy” and “unhealthy” (TNIV) in the sense of “generous” and “stingy” (TNIV mg) capture the sense much better.<sup>31</sup>

Matt. 18:24, 28—The explanatory footnotes giving the equivalent in dollars to talents and denarii have now been corrected. “Millions” and “a few” were always too small; “billions” and “a few hundred” come much closer.<sup>32</sup>

Mark 4:31—A classic case of the NIV turning a translation into an interpretation, understandable since this is one of the famous apparent contradictions in Scripture, was its reference to the mustard seed as the “smallest seed you plant in the ground.” This has now been corrected to the more literal “smallest of all seeds on earth.”

Luke 11:8—“Boldness” in the NIV was an improvement over the common translation “persistence” (see NIV mg) for *anaideia*. But the idea represented by the word is stronger still, and “shameless audacity” in the TNIV well captures the flavor. The new footnote also recognizes the possibility that the term refers to a quality of the man who had been sleeping, not the man who had been knocking, hence “to preserve his good name.”<sup>33</sup>

Luke 18:5—Another forceful idiom in the parables, which more literally means “to blacken the face,” is more vividly translated “come and attack me” rather than the fairly bland “wear me out with her coming.”<sup>34</sup>

Luke 22:31—Few English translations ever distinguish between “you” (singular) and “you” (plural) in any part of Scripture, but here is one place where it is particularly important to do so, lest the reader think that Satan was going to attack only Simon Peter. The TNIV thus rightly translates, “Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat.”

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<sup>31</sup> *Poneros* can in other contexts mean simply “wicked” or “evil.” But as the opposite of *haplous* which is not a general term for “good,” it is likely that these more precise meanings are intended.

<sup>32</sup> The talent was the largest unit of currency in the Roman Empire; 10,000, the largest numeral (from which we get our English “myriad”). A literal quantity may not even have been in view but simply some enormous sum equivalent to our slang English expression “zillions.” A denarius was a day's minimum wage, so 100 denarii could never have been equivalent to merely “a few dollars” during any period of American history since the first edition of the NIV appeared in 1973.

<sup>33</sup> For the two main approaches, see, respectively, Brad H. Young, *The Parables: Jewish Tradition and Christian Interpretation* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 45-51; and Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 119-33.

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Kenneth E. Bailey, *Through Peasant Eyes: More Lucan Parables* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 136.

Luke 22:70 (cf. John 18:37)—Again the NIV may have correctly interpreted, but it went beyond translating by giving Christ's reply to his interrogators as “You are right in saying I am” [the Messiah]. The Greek means simply, “You say that I am” (*humeis legete hoti egō eimi*).

John 10:8—It is patently false that all the shepherds who “ever came before” Christ “were” thieves and robbers; consider the various godly Jewish leaders scattered throughout the Old Testament. The TNIV is more accurate, by avoiding a dubious textual variant, not inserting “ever” and translating a present tense verb, with its “All who have come before me are,” suggesting a reference just to current Jewish leadership.<sup>35</sup>

John 14:2—Readers disappointed with the demotion of “mansions” (KJV) to “rooms” (NIV) should be pleased that the TNIV accurately renders the idiom as “plenty of room.”

John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7—In our therapeutic world with many trained psychologists, it would be easy to misunderstand what Jesus meant by referring to the Holy Spirit or “Paraclete” as a “Counselor.” Though no one English word captures all of the sense, “Advocate” is probably the best we can come up with.<sup>36</sup>

John 16:8—One can understand how the Paraclete “convicts” the world of sin, but it is harder to understand how this verb applies to “righteousness and judgment.” But the TNIV is clear: “He will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment.”<sup>37</sup>

Romans 3:22—Given the flurry of recent studies that treat the “faith of Jesus” here (and elsewhere in Paul) as the faithfulness Jesus demonstrated (an approach reflected, interestingly, already in the KJV), it is good to have a footnote in the TNIV with that option. But the revisers were probably right to keep “faith in Jesus” in the text as the more likely translation.<sup>38</sup>

Rom. 11:26—The notoriously difficult *houtōs* in this verse (NIV “so”) is not naturally taken as a temporal connective equivalent to “then.” “In this way” (TNIV)

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev. 1995), 450-51.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. further Craig L. Blomberg, *The Historical Reliability of John's Gospel: Issues and Commentary* (Downers Grove & Leicester: IVP, 2001), 201.

<sup>37</sup> See esp. D. A. Carson, “The Function of the Paraclete in John 16:7-11,” *JBL* 98 (1979): 547-66.

<sup>38</sup> See, e.g., Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1996), 225.

clarifies this and more clearly allows for both main exegetical options in this passage. Either the coming to faith of “all Israel” is something that happens at the end of history, closely related in some way to Christ's return, or “all Israel” is equivalent to the sum total of God's people in old and new covenant eras throughout history.

1 Cor. 2:15—Paul of course does submit himself to “man's judgment” in various ways, most notably to the legal processes of Rome, and encourages believers to do the same (Rom. 13:1-7). But he never trusts in “merely human judgments,”—i.e., those which have no divine sanction of any kind.

1 Cor. 3:16, 6:19—In context, the plural “you” in 3:16 suggests that Paul is describing how God's Spirit dwells in Christians corporately, as they form a temple or holy community. “Dwells in your midst” now clarifies this. The similar statement in 6:19, however, more naturally applies to each individual, a point made clearer by the distributive plural—“your bodies” are a temple of the Holy Spirit.<sup>39</sup>

1 Cor. 6:9—That it is not homosexual orientation but behavior that Paul censures is clarified by the switch from “homosexual offenders” to “practicing homosexuals” (again the Greek is *arsenokoitai*).

1 Cor. 6:12-13—Adding “you say” and extending the portion included in quotation marks make it even clearer that these words are a Corinthian slogan that Paul must rebut.

1 Cor. 7:8—The likelihood that Paul here is addressing “widowers and widows,” since the masculine form of “widow” was dying out in *koinē* Greek and the never married are treated later in the chapter, is acknowledged at least by the new footnote.<sup>40</sup>

1 Cor. 11:21—The probable historical context of the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper is more evident, thanks to the substitution of “with your own private suppers” for “without waiting for anybody else.” It is also a bit closer to the literal Greek, which reads, “goes ahead in eating.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. further Craig L. Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 75, 127.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. further Fee, *First Corinthians*, 287-88.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. further Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 145-74.

1 Cor. 13:3—The general preference of textual critics for “give over my body [to hardship]” rather than “give over my body to the flames” is reflected in the TNIV's reversal of what the NIV put in the text and what it put in the footnote.

2 Cor. 5:13—Again, the likelihood that Paul is quoting a charge some Corinthians are leveling against him (“if we are out of our mind”) is made plain by the insertion of the words, “as some say.”

Phil. 2:6—NIV's “something to be grasped” could be construed as meaning that Jesus did not have equality with God before the incarnation. “Used to his own advantage” captures the sense of *harpagmos* and avoids the misimpression.<sup>42</sup>

1 Thess. 2:7—Textual critics again prefer the TNIV's “young children” (Gk. *nēpioi*) to NIV's “gentle” (*ēpioi*), though given the strength of the evidence for each it is surprising that neither edition gives a footnote to the other option.

1 Thess. 4:1 (cf. 2 Thess. 3:1)—Recognizing that *to loipon* can mean “As for other matters,” solves the problem that has puzzled many readers of Paul's “finally,” when in fact he continues to write quite a bit more.<sup>43</sup>

1 Tim. 1:19—“Shipwrecked their faith” has led many to think Hymenaeus and Alexander lost their salvation. “Suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith” involves a more common translation of the definite article and comes closer to the notion of their having damaged Christianity, “in the sense of bringing the church under reproach,” which is probably what Paul meant.<sup>44</sup>

1 Tim. 2:9 (cf. 1 Pet. 3:3)—There is nothing inherently wrong with braided hair, but in the Greco-Roman world of Paul's day many wealthy women spent hours a day on intricate coiffure, weaving their hair together with expensive jewelry. This is clearer with the TNIV's “elaborate hairstyles.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See, e.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 215-16.

<sup>43</sup> See, e.g., F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Waco: Word, 1982), 78.

<sup>44</sup> William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: Nelson, 2000), 67.

<sup>45</sup> See esp. James B. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective* (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 198-99.

1 Tim. 3:12 (cf. Tit. 1:6)—It is generally recognized today that “husband of one wife” means something like “currently faithful to one's spouse, if married.”<sup>46</sup> This is somewhat clearer with the TNIV's “faithful to his wife.”

Heb. 4:2—Again the reversal of text and footnote both reflects the consensus of textual critics and offers a slightly clearer statement that the Israelites who were judged in the wilderness never had genuine faith to begin with.

Rev. 2:10—“Life as your victor's crown” reflects John's appositional genitive in his expression “crown of life” (*ton stephanon tēs zoēs*). As with the other “crown” passages in the New Testament, the inspired writers are speaking of eternal life itself, not some degree of reward within it.<sup>47</sup>

Rev. 14:4—“Remained virgins” (*parthenoi*) is more literal than “kept themselves pure” and indicates what kind of purity John is describing.

This list could be lengthened substantially but the point should be obvious. The TNIV consistently improves the NIV in the comparatively small number of places where the NIV really was not a terribly good translation. One could have hoped that even those critics who disagreed with the TNIV's gender-inclusive language policy would have noted these improvements and given the new translation due credit in more balanced reviews.

### The Gender-Inclusive Issue

But what about the “twenty-something” percentage of changes related to gender?

#### General Observations

First it must be noted that approximately two-thirds of these changes in fact do follow the CSG that permit the plurals *anthrōpoi* (“men”), *huioi* (“sons”) and *adelphoi* (“brothers”) to be rendered with expressions like “people,” “children,” and “brothers and sisters,” when the context indicates that mixed company is intended. Similarly, numerous uses of *tis* (“someone” or “anyone”), *pas* (“all” or “everyone”), generic masculine singular participles (“he who”) and even a limited number of singular forms of

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., Sydney Page, “Marital Expectations of Church Leaders in the Pastoral Epistles,” *JSNT* 50 (1993): 105-20.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. further Craig L. Blomberg, “Degrees of Reward in the Kingdom of Heaven?” *JETS* 35 (1992): 163-64.

*anthrōpos* (“man”) may be rendered gender-inclusively when the context supports that interpretation.

A second general comment is that despite the claims of some of its critics, the TNIV has numerous places where it retains gender-exclusive language, when a case could have been made for a more inclusive rendering. I counted about two dozen such places (Matt. 10:21, 35; 12:29; 13:44, 45; 15:38; 23:8; Lk. 17:7-9; Acts 3:25; 13:50; 22:1, 27:10, 21, 25; 28:17; Rom. 5:15-17; 8:15 (and elsewhere when the adoption metaphor is used); 12:20; 1 Cor. 16:11-12; 2 Cor. 8:16-24; 9:3; Col. 3:21; Rev. 12:9 and 13:18).

Third, a brief comment needs to be made about the TNIV's renderings of *anēr*. The CSG object to rendering this term that often means male (vs. female) or husband (vs. wife) with gender-inclusive language. But in fact, one well-attested meaning of the word is as a synonym for *anthrōpos*.<sup>48</sup> In James, probably every use of *anēr* falls into this category. James 1:8, the first such usage in the epistle, clearly employs *anēr* as parallel to the generic “man” described as *anthrōpos* in v. 7, and a quick glance at all of the other uses of *anēr* in this letter demonstrates that almost all clearly refer to men and women alike (1:12, 20, 23; 3:2; the possible exception is 2:2). This is what linguists call an idiolect, when a particular speaker uses a less common meaning of a term fairly consistently as part of his or her distinctive style.<sup>49</sup> Luke's use of *anēr* in translating introductory addresses to crowds of mixed gender in Acts reflects a similar idiolect (e.g., Acts 1:16; 2:14, 22, 29; 3:12, etc.). In each case the TNIV offers an improvement over the NIV. In short, each usage of *anēr* must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis, in context, even if it is true that the sizable majority of New Testament uses do wind up referring to males as over against females.

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<sup>48</sup> H. Vorländer (“*ἀνὴρ*,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin C. Brown, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976], 562-63) notes that the term in both classical Greek and the New Testament can mean simply “adult” or be used “without emphasis” on maleness, or refer simply to man “as genus” and thus equivalent to *anthrōpos*. J. B. Bauer (“*ἀνὴρ, ἀνδρῶς, ὁ*,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, vol. 1 [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 98-99) notes that the term can refer to “human beings in general,” supplying fourteen examples from the New Testament and two from the papyri. Walter Bauer (“*ἀνὴρ, ἀνδρῶς, ὁ*,” in *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament in Other Early Christian Literature*, rev. and ed. Frederick W. Danker [Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000<sup>3</sup>], 79) lists as the second of three main definitions, “equiv. to *τίς someone, a person*,” with nine New Testament and nineteen non-New Testament references.

<sup>49</sup> So also Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate*, 162.

A fourth generalization involves a very sizable group of changes, when “man” is used to mean a human being in contrast with God or an adult in contrast with a child. Here to continue to use “man” risks leading the contemporary reader astray by suggesting that the inspired author's point is one of gender when it is not. A short excerpt of a large number of such texts includes 1 Cor. 15:21; Phil. 2:8; Col. 3:23; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 8:2, 13:6; Jas. 1:20, 5:17; 1 Pet. 2:13, 4:6; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 John 5:9 and Rev. 14:4. This kind of translation occurred already in the NIV in a handful of cases (e.g., Rom. 3:5; 1 Cor. 9:8, 15:32; Gal. 3:15; Phil. 2:7; Rev. 9:7) and for years caused no alarm or misunderstanding, so it is odd for the framers of the CSG suddenly to object to it.

Without going into the disputed question of whether “man” in such texts was also derivatively intended to point to the male gender's representative headship, it may be pointed out that the danger of missing the biblical author's primary meaning should be a greater concern than that of missing what is at best a secondary, and possibly altogether unintended, meaning. Male headship remains present in countless Scriptural texts that the TNIV has not altered (see below). Thus to complain about using gender-inclusive language in the texts just noted sounds a bit like the charges that deleting the famous, later additions to 1 John 5:7-8 is an attack on the Trinity, when it is in fact simply following legitimate textual critical principles in full knowledge of the fact that plenty of other undisputed passages clearly teach the doctrine of the Triune Godhead!

#### The Famous Gender Role Passages

This is then the logical place to comment on the passages in the New Testament epistles that most directly bear on the question of male headship in the family and in the church. When one reads the polemic unleashed against the TNIV by its harshest critics, one imagines that feminist concerns must surely have done substantial violence to the texts that most directly challenge an egalitarian position. *In fact, these texts have barely been altered at all in the TNIV.*

1 Cor. 11:2-16. Most of this passage remains unchanged. The only change in the text itself that bears on gender-roles issues actually reflects a *less* “feminist” reading than in the NIV. The gratuitous “sign of “ before “authority” in v. 10 has been relegated to a footnote, so that this verse now reads “the woman ought to have authority over her own head,” an expression I have argued means “control over” and thus implies proper



submission to authority.<sup>50</sup> The translation of *kephalē* as “head” throughout the passage remains unchanged. The long footnote to an alternate translation of vv. 4-7, in which the head covering in question is simply “hair,” has been dropped. While I follow a minority that think this may have been the correct *interpretation*, it is true that it was not as obvious a *translation*. A new footnote to v. 3 has been added, correctly pointing out that “man” and “woman” could also be translated “husband” and “wife.” That is the full extent of revisions bearing on gender roles.

1 Cor. 14:33-38—Changes here are even more minor. The paragraph division has been changed from the middle of v. 33 to the end. This could reflect an unwillingness to generalize Paul's teaching on women's submission to “all the congregations of the people of God,” but there is a syntactical reason unrelated to the gender roles controversies for making this shift, too. “In the churches” in v. 34 already generalizes, making an introductory generalization redundant, and the kind of comparative clause with which v. 33 ends more commonly completes an argument in Paul rather than starting a new one. The issue is finely balanced; I have elsewhere opted for the earlier NIV division<sup>51</sup> but the change scarcely makes an egalitarian interpretation of the paragraph more probable.

The other relevant change is the addition of a footnote stating that in some manuscripts vv. 34-35 come after v. 40. This addition probably does reflect one egalitarian approach that argues from this textual variant to conclude that these verses may not have been in Paul's original letter at all,<sup>52</sup> though this conclusion stands little chance of being correct.<sup>53</sup> The textual evidence in favor of this different location is so late and so meager that nowhere else in either the NIV or the TNIV is an equally weak variant ever noted. That suggests that the gender-roles debate has triggered the inclusion of the footnote. But, again, it scarcely tips the scales in favor of an egalitarian interpretation.

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<sup>50</sup> Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 212.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-82.

<sup>52</sup> Defended most recently by Philip B. Payne, “Fuldensis, Sigla for Variants in Vaticanus, and 1 Cor. 14.34-5,” *NTS* 41 (1995): 240-62; and *idem.*, “MS. 88 as Evidence for a Text without 1 Cor. 14.34-5,” *NTS* 44 (1998): 152-58.

<sup>53</sup> See Craig L. Blomberg, “Neither Hierarchicalist Nor Egalitarian: Gender Roles in Paul,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, ed. James R. Beck and Craig L. Blomberg (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 348-49.

1 Tim. 2:11-15—The passage that has generated more controversy than any other in the gender-roles debate has been least “tampered” with of all! *Hēsuchia* in v. 11 is correctly rendered “quiet” rather than “silent” (cf. the cognate in 2:2), that is “respectful and submissive” but not “mute,” as complementarians regularly acknowledge. A footnote correctly observes that *authentēin* can mean “to exercise authority over” (though I fail to see how this significantly differs from the text, “to have authority over”) or “to dominate”<sup>54</sup> but correctly, in my opinion, preserves the rendering of the NIV in the text itself.

Eph. 5:21-33 (cf. Col. 3:18-19)—Again there is a change in the paragraph break, putting v. 21 as a separate paragraph introducing the larger section labeled “Instructions for Christian Households.” But, whether intended or not, this shift actually more clearly supports the complementarian claim that mutual submission in this verse does not mean that every Christian submits to every other Christian but is a headline over the three specific kinds of submission that 5:22-6:9 go on to enunciate.<sup>55</sup> Otherwise, the only relevant change in the text is the addition of “yourselves” after the command to wives to submit (cf. “themselves” in 1 Pet. 3:5), bringing out the force of the probable middle voice as something wives voluntarily do. But again that is a point that complementarians themselves have frequently stressed.<sup>56</sup>

Rom. 16:7—The name translated as “Junias” in the NIV is now rendered “Junia.” This change will prove meaningless to the average Bible reader, but for those “in the know,” this reflects the uniform testimony of the early church, the uniform usage in ancient Rome, and the most probable identification on sheer grammatical grounds that an accusative *-an* ending reflects a woman's name. That still leaves open the question of whether Junia is being called an apostle or not, and, even if she is, Paul probably is using the term, as he does when listing “apostle” among the spiritual gifts God gives to people irrespective of gender, as a missionary or church-planter. Again, complementarians have regularly acknowledged these points.<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See esp. Leland E. Wilshire, “The TLG Computer and Further Reference to *ATΘENTEIN* in 1 Tim. 2.12,” *NTS* 34 (1988): 120-34.

<sup>55</sup> See esp. Hurley, *Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*, 139-41.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids & Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999), 411; Wayne Grudem, *The First Epistle of Peter* (Leicester: IVP, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 135.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., Schreiner, *Romans*, 795-96.

Rom. 16:1, 1 Tim. 3:11—The only point in all of the epistles' famous gender-role texts that could understandably cause complementarians some concern is thus the decision to render *diakonos* as “deacon” (with a footnote giving the alternative, “servant”), referring to the woman Phoebe in Romans 16:1, and the related choice to render the word for “women” (from *gynē*) in 1 Tim. 3:11 as “women [who are deacons],” again with a footnote to the NIV rendering, “[deacons'] wives.” I say that the concern is understandable because there are a variety of conservative churches that have a well-entrenched history of limiting deacons, or their functional equivalents, to men.

But again, a truly evangelical doctrine of Scripture must ask what Paul most likely meant and then seek to be obedient to it, rather than rejecting a translation simply because it violates current church practice! And the fact of the matter is that the word used for Phoebe is the word that is used every time in the New Testament when the NIV (or even the KJV) translates “deacon.” That she is called a *diakonos* “of the church in Cenchrēa” most naturally suggests an office or leadership role, not merely the more general meaning of “servant.” And while the women who appear abruptly in Paul's discussion of criteria for choosing deacons in 1 Timothy (3:8-13) *could* be “deacons' wives,” that translation is as much an interpretation of the simple word “women” as is the translation “women who are deacons.” And if Paul had simply deacons' wives in view then it is incomprehensible why he wouldn't have included matching criteria for the godly nature of overseers' wives in the previous section (1 Tim. 3:1-7). But if he envisioned women deacons but no women overseers, then the omission makes sense. And again all of these points have been made by complementarian authors.<sup>58</sup>

#### Other Particularly Controversial Texts

What, then, of other specific passages, not relevant to the issue of gender roles in home or church, that have come under frequent fire for their inclusive language? The TNIV website has identified nineteen such passages,<sup>59</sup> though obviously different people's lists would vary a little. Zondervan, IBS and CBT have then produced short explanations of the rationale behind the TNIV's translation in each case, and these

<sup>58</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner makes every one of these points in his “Women in Ministry,” in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, 193-94, concluding forthrightly, “I conclude that women did serve as deacons in the New Testament and that they should serve as such in our churches today.”

<sup>59</sup> Mark 1:17; Luke 17:3; John 6:33, 19:12; Acts 4:4, 7:20, 17:22; 20:30; Rom. 8:27; 1 Cor. 14:28; 1 Tim. 2:5, 3:11; Heb. 2:6-7, 2:17, 12:7; Jas. 1:12, 3:1, 5:20; Rev. 3:20.

explanations are generally quite good.<sup>60</sup> I will comment on only two of the most misunderstood texts here.

Heb. 2:6-7—People familiar with the NIV (or even KJV with appropriate “thous” and “arts”) are used to hearing, “What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” as a quotation from Psa. 8:4. The TNIV reads instead, “What are mere mortals that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them?” The charge has thus been leveled that a Messianic Psalm has been distorted and the links between Hebrews and Jesus, the Son of Man, have been lost. But, in reality, Old Testament scholars are largely agreed that Psalm 8 in its original context was not Messianic, but was speaking of human frailty and the marvel of God's care for us puny, mortal creatures. When Jesus calls himself Son of Man, he is drawing on the imagery of Dan. 7:13-14, not Psa. 8. Psalm 8 is more akin to the repeated references throughout Ezekiel to the prophet as “son of man,” meaning “merely mortal.”<sup>61</sup> In fact, reading in a reference to Jesus before v. 9 of Hebrews 2 misses the author's main point. It was precisely to the first *humans*, Adam and Eve, that God assigned the task of putting “everything under their feet” (v. 8a; Psa. 8:6), that is exercising the dominion over creation that their unique image-bearing nature required (Gen. 1:26-28). But Adam and Eve sinned and humanity ever since has failed to steward the creation as God intended (Heb. 2:8b). Now, however, Jesus has come and proved to be the perfect human that Adam and Eve failed to be: “But we do see Jesus” (v. 9). The TNIV is actually clearer in its rendering of the logic of the author of Hebrews than more traditional translations.<sup>62</sup>

Heb. 12:7—The NIV reads, “Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father?” The TNIV substitutes for the second and third clauses, “God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their parents?” The change from sons to children has already been

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<sup>60</sup> <http://www.tniv.info/bible/sample.php>. One exception is the comment on John 6:33, in which it sounds as if *ho katabainōn* is being identified as neuter rather than masculine. What the blurb should convey is that, since Jesus is calling himself “bread,” which is an impersonal concept in English, in the subject clause of the sentence, than it is appropriate *in English translation* to use either the impersonal “that which” or the personal “he who” to introduce the predicate portion of the sentence.

<sup>61</sup> Cf., e.g., Willem A. VanGemeren, “Psalms,” in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelein, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 12.

<sup>62</sup> Carson (“The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation”) notes that approximately three-quarters of his forty or so commentaries on Hebrews take this approach.

sanctioned by the CSG. But the change from “father” to “parents” has been alleged to efface the masculinity of God. In fact, it does nothing of the kind. The change comes in a context where it is clear a human father is in view. But, comes the reply, the human father is an analogy in this context for God, so God is implicitly being called a parent, when he should be called a father. The appropriate response to this reply is twofold: First, God, like every father, *is* also a parent; to call him that does not deny his fatherhood. Second, and more importantly, in only two more verses, the TNIV explicitly calls God “the Father” (v. 9), when he is explicitly in view. No one is muting God's masculinity here!

I have selected these two texts from Hebrews for specific comment because they are the two that are most commonly cited to support the entirely erroneous claim that the TNIV is employing inclusive-language with respect to God or Jesus.<sup>63</sup> There is not a single passage in the entire New Testament in which that is the case, and it is one of the most inaccurate and irresponsible charges for the TNIV's critics to level. There *are* translations of portions of Scripture that use inclusive language for the Godhead—God as “Father and Mother,” for example—and they do merit pointed criticism,<sup>64</sup> but the TNIV is most assuredly *not* one of them. This point needs to be stated firmly given the amount of misinformation currently being circulated by people who have never even read the TNIV.

#### Changing Generic Third Person Masculine Forms

The final major complaint that the TNIV's critics make involves the frequent use of a third person plural pronoun (they, them, their) to refer back to a singular antecedent and thus avoid a singular masculine pronoun (he, him, his), when the antecedent is clearly generic, referring to men and women alike. Or, less commonly, a second person form (you, your) is substituted. There are four main objections to these substitutions that have been put forward. (1) For those raised on an older form of standard English, the sentences sound stylistically poor. Some of us can remember high school or college

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<sup>63</sup> Paul Hetrick, vice president of communications for Focus on the Family, was reported as saying the TNIV contains “many translation misfires which alter inviolable Christian truths, including the belief that Jesus is the Messiah and that he’s divine” (Jean Torkelson, “New Translation of Bible Rankles Some Christians,” *Rocky Mountain News* [Feb. 9, 2002]). One can only hope that Hetrick himself was misrepresented in this report, as false as the statement is!

<sup>64</sup> For a good critique see Strauss, *Distorting Scripture?* 60-73.

English teachers decades ago marking us down for writing such prose! (2) The translation that results is not as literal as it could have been with a generic singular masculine pronoun. (3) A third person plural destroys the individual implications of the singular. Thus, rendering Rev. 3:20, “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with them, and they with me,” could mislead readers into thinking that Christ's promise was true only for the church corporately and not for each individual person. (4) The “masculinity” of God's words are muted, to borrow again the subtitle of Poythress' and Grudem's book, since male headship is being taught by the use of a generic masculine form in the biblical languages when representing men and women together.

We may make the following replies. First, the last of these four points may be dismissed almost immediately. Carson has shown that a sizable number of the world's languages do not even have the ability to follow the CSG, because they do not use the masculine singular form in the same generic sense as (older) English.<sup>65</sup> If a grammatical form does not even exist in a number of the world's languages, it makes no sense to claim that such a form preserves some timeless gender-related principle that God deemed it important for all people to know.<sup>66</sup> The argument is akin to that of the supporters of the King James Only movement, who think that the existence of an English translation supposedly based on the so-called Textus Receptus proves that God not only inspired an originally inerrant Bible but also preserved it inerrantly. Seldom do they stop to observe that many other languages in the history of Bible translation have not even had access to anything like the textual base from which the KJV translators worked, which means that God's providence must have been repeatedly thwarted!

Second, what is or is not stylistically poor or even grammatically correct in any language is nothing more than the consensus at any given time of the people within a particular language group that make such evaluations. Languages change and then such evaluations change. I am old enough to empathize with those who find such person and number shifts inelegant, but I also recognize that in spoken English I almost never hear anyone any more completing a sentence of the form, “Everyone who comes to class

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<sup>65</sup> Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate*, 77-98.

<sup>66</sup> Poythress' and Grudem's reply to Carson (pp. 201-2) badly misses his original point, as Carson points out in “The Limits of Functional Equivalence in Bible Translation.”

tomorrow should bring \_\_\_\_\_ textbook with \_\_\_\_\_,” with anything other than “their” and “them,” respectively. And since the late 1980s, the Modern Language Association, the primary American organization that pontificates on what is or isn't acceptable in written English, has approved of and even encouraged the use of plural pronouns to refer back to generic singular antecedents.<sup>67</sup>

Third, there is no question that a change of person or number renders a translation less than fully literal. If such changes were being introduced into the NASB, one would have reason to complain, because the translation theory behind that Bible was a highly literal one. But, as we noted early on, the NIV has always sought to bridge the gap between formal and functional equivalence; the substitutions that the TNIV has made are fully in keeping with that objective. On rare occasions, the NIV had already made such substitutions (cf., e.g., 1 John 3:24 [singular to plural]; John 20:23 [plural to singular]; John 4:50 [second person to third person]); it is only when these are made on a larger scale that people notice.

Fourth, the claim that a third-person plural destroys an individual application of a passage seems to me to be almost entirely a “straw man,” as the TNIV's critics would have us phrase it. In the thirty-two years of my Christian life, ministering in every major section of the United States and on four other continents, I have never once heard anyone make this mistake. There are plenty of commands and promises of Scripture that are in the plural in the original languages (consider, e.g., the beatitudes or the warnings against worry and wealth in the Sermon on the Mount), and I know of no one who assumes these do not apply to individual believers. Indeed, if anything, the reverse problem afflicts the Western world. Numerous statements in the Bible are addressed to groups of people with the second person plural—“y'all,” as many of our Southern friends would say. In a number of instances, one can be seriously misled if one thinks the “you”s in our English translation refer to individuals rather than groups (consider, e.g., Matt. 6:33 or 1 Cor. 3:17, on which I have commented elsewhere<sup>68</sup>). *If clarity and a high degree of literalness is so crucial, why are the TNIV's critics not complaining that no current English-language translation enables readers to distinguish between second person*

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<sup>67</sup> I borrow these points from my earlier review of Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, in *Denver Journal* 4 (2001), <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles/01/0200/0204.html>.

<sup>68</sup> Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 126; idem, *1 Corinthians*, 75, 81.

*singular and plural pronouns?* It would appear that a different agenda is actually driving their complaints.<sup>69</sup>

Moreover, in a text like Rev. 3:20 (and numerous other similar examples), the context makes it crystal clear that there is an individual application. The TNIV reads, “If *anyone* hears my voice and opens the door. . .” I find it hard to imagine how anyone could read this introductory clause and then think that the promise applied only to some group of believers corporately.

As for changing a third person to a second person, as one goes through the TNIV noting these substitutions, in almost every instance, the Greek itself uses “you” in the immediate context interchangeably with a third person form, thus again justifying the TNIV’s reading and guarding against any misinterpretation. For example, James 1:5-6a translates literally, “If any of you (pl.) lacks wisdom, let him ask from the God who gives generously and without reproaching, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith. . . .” By the same older English standards, this translation would be graded down, precisely because of the shift from second person plural to third person singular. The TNIV produces a stylistically superior, consistent rendering: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you. But when you ask, you must believe. . . .” To be consistent, the TNIV’s critics should prefer the TNIV here, since other translations run the risk of not making it clear that James’ readers (“you”) are still being addressed and that these commands are to be personally applied by them.

#### How the CSG Unwittingly Impugn Scripture

The most serious problem with the strictures of the CSG, however, have yet to be discussed. I do not know if any of its framers, or any of the signatories condemning the TNIV, are even aware of the phenomena I am about to discuss, hence my use of the word “unwitting” in this subtitle, because I want to give them the benefit of the doubt.

Poythress and Grudem, of course, are aware of some of them, because Carson and

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<sup>69</sup> See the remarkably candid statement by R. Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who will no longer endorse even the NIV and is now promoting particularly the HCSB (produced by the SBC’s Broadman and Holman Press), “if for no other reason than that we will have a major translation we can control” (Reed, “Southern Baptists Blast TNIV,” 17). Likewise, the CBMW leadership was heavily involved in producing the ESV, now also being promoted by them as a superior translation.



Strauss pointed a few out in their writings, to which Poythress and Grudem then responded. But that context was one of discussing the fact that in New Testament quotations of the Old, generic masculine singulars were at times rendered by the third person plural, and singular forms of “man” or “son” were rendered by singular or plural forms such as “men,” “child,” “children,” and even “sons and daughters” (see esp. 2 Sam. 7:14, quoted in 2 Cor. 6:18; Isa. 52:7, quoted in Rom. 10:15; Psa. 36:1, quoted in Rom. 3:18; and Psalm 32:1, quoted in Rom. 4:7-8).<sup>70</sup> Moreover, the New Testament also changes second person forms to third persons (Exod. 13:2, quoted in Luke 2:23; Psa. 68:18, quoted in Eph. 4:8), and third person forms to first persons (1 Sam. 13:14, quoted in Acts 13:22; Isa. 28:11, quoted in 1 Cor. 14:21).<sup>71</sup> These practices should cause one to think very hard before ever criticizing modern translators from doing what the inspired authors did. Yet at the same time, Poythress and Grudem correctly observe that the New Testament many times goes beyond mere translation to interpretation and application in its “quotations” of the Old Testament.<sup>72</sup> So perhaps these examples are not as conclusive as they might at first appear.

I would like, therefore, to call attention to a different, though related, set of phenomena—*places where within the Greek New Testament itself, an inspired author shifts between singulars and plurals or between second and third persons, in contexts that suggest no demonstrable difference in meaning.* Some of these afford strikingly close parallels to the grammatical constructions the TNIV has employed. For example, Jas. 2:15 offers a rare New Testament example in which the actual phrase “brother or sister” appears in the Greek text (*adelphos hē adelphē*). The Greek of vv. 15-16 literally reads, “If a brother or sister are (pl.) naked [or “poorly clothed”] and lack (pl.) daily food, and if any of you says to *them*, 'Go (pl.) in peace, be (pl.) warm and be (pl.) well fed,' and does not give *them*. . .” As in English, a Greek compound subject of the form “a or b,” when b is a singular noun, should take singular pronouns and singular verbs.<sup>73</sup> But James has felt free for whatever reason to use the third person plural form seven times.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>70</sup> Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate*, 19-20, 115-16 (following Strauss on these latter two pages).

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 175-76.

<sup>72</sup> Poythress and Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 198-201.

<sup>73</sup> Ralph P. Martin, *James* (Waco: Word, 1988), 84; following BDF, 75, sec. 135 (4).

<sup>74</sup> Indeed a phenomenon well known even to first-year Greek students is that Greek neuter plural subjects in the New Testament normally take singular verbs. Daniel B. Wallace (*Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*

Or consider John 3. The apostle reports Jesus' words to Nicodemus in verse 3 literally as “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless someone is born from above (or “again”), he cannot see the kingdom of God.” In verse 5, he repeats himself: “Amen, amen, I say to you, unless someone was born of water and spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God.” But in verse 7, Jesus refers back to what he has just said twice with these words: “Stop marveling that I said to you, ‘You (pl.) must be born from above (or “again”).’” Jesus (or John rendering Jesus' Aramaic into Greek) finds it perfectly acceptable to use the second person instead of the third person to restate what he just said. Moreover, Nicodemus is clearly meant to personalize this command, yet the Greek retains the plural rather than the singular form, since it is a generalization that also holds true for everyone.<sup>75</sup>

John 15:15 presents another interesting shift from the plural to the singular and back to the plural again. The Greek reads literally, “No longer do I call you slaves, for the slave does not know what his master does. Instead I have called you friends.” The middle clause of these three is clearly proverbial and, in this context, refers to all the disciples, not to just one, as the first and third clauses make plain. English purists would have asked John to revise his middle section to read, “for slaves do not know what their masters do,” and the meaning would have been unchanged.<sup>76</sup> Likewise the first eight beatitudes in Matthew are all in the third person plural, but the last one shifts to the second person plural without any change of audience implied (Matt. 5:3-11). Luke's parallel preserves the identical shift and also feels free to introduce the *second* person plural possessive pronoun *hūmetēra* (Luke 6:20) where Matthew used the *third* person.

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[Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996], 399-400) discusses this phenomenon, noting that, “since the neuter usually refers to impersonal things (including animals), the singular verb regards the plural subject as a *collective* whole.” This nuance, however, is lost when in order to create grammatically coherent English sentences we translate with plural verbs. The amount of precision the framers of the CSG are requiring of translators, however, should dictate that they call for a reinstatement of this lack of concord particularly because a further distinction is lost, as Wallace explains: “however, when the author wants to *stress* the individuality of each subject involved in a neuter plural subject, the plural verb is used.” Of course, the point of this illustration is not seriously to argue for a literal rendering of these phenomena but to show the *reductio ad absurdum* that the ideology behind some of the CSG guidelines generates.

<sup>75</sup> D. A. Carson (*The Gospel According to John* [Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991], 197) comments, “But the plural 'you' is simply a strengthened form of the generalizing 'anyone' or 'a man' (Gk. *tis*) in 3:3, 5 . . . .”

<sup>76</sup> Cf. the (unconscious?) change from plural to singular to plural in the comments by Morris, *John*, 599.

I already mentioned Rom. 4:7-8 in my brief list of New Testament uses of the Old. But it is also important to note that this text, as rendered by Paul, even just within its context in Romans, shifts from the generic masculine plural pronoun “whose” (*hōn*), used twice in v. 7, to the singular *anēr* in v. 8 in statements that are otherwise conceptually identical: “Blessed [are those] whose lawless acts were forgiven, and whose sins were covered. Blessed [is the] man to whom the Lord does not reckon sin.” Not only are singular and plural interchangeable, but *anēr* is equally clearly used generically.<sup>77</sup> Rom. 13:2 contains a similar shift between its two clauses from the singular to the plural masculine participles of *antitassomai*, with both proving equally generic: “Therefore, the one resisting has resisted the authority that was appointed by God; and the ones having resisted will receive judgment on themselves.”

1 Corinthians 7:20-24 contains another telling mixture of persons and numbers. Once again translating literally, even to the point of woodenness, we read, “Let each remain in this—in the calling in which he was called. Were you (sg.) called a slave? Don't let it be a care to you (sg.). But if you (sg.) can become free, all the more use [the opportunity]. For he who was called (generic participle) [as] a slave is the Lord's freedman (masc. adj.). Likewise he who was called (gen. part.) [as] a free man (masc. adj.) is a slave of Christ. You (pl.) were bought with a price. Stop becoming (pl.) slaves of men. Each in which [state] he was called, in this let him remain before God.” This is barbaric alternation among persons and numbers according to classic English style, but then Paul was never taught classic English style.<sup>78</sup> The shifts represented here are remarkably parallel to a large number of those in the TNIV that its critics challenge as threatening inerrancy. One wonders whose criteria really pose the threat!

One final example must suffice. Mark 2:22a reads literally, “And *no one* puts new wine into old wineskins.” Matthew's parallel, probably composed in conscious dependence on Mark, changes the wording to read, “Nor do *they* [subject unexpressed] put new wine into old wineskins” (Matt. 9:17). There is nothing here to suggest that Matthew is in any way re-interpreting or re-applying Christ's words, as he sometimes

<sup>77</sup> Schreiner (*Romans*, 213) correctly renders it here as “person.”

<sup>78</sup> Thiselton (*1 Corinthians*, 544) offers another stylistically inelegant but conceptually accurate and gender-inclusive translation. He, too, perhaps even unconsciously, rephrases the meaning of the third-person portion of v. 20 with second-person language (p. 553).

does with Markan parallels or as the New Testament often does with Old Testament “quotations.” There is no perceptible difference in meaning between Matthew and Mark.<sup>79</sup> The proverbial nature of Jesus' metaphor can be equally clearly rendered with either the singular or the plural form.

### Conclusion

I do not wish to give the impression that the TNIV is above criticism. As I read it, I noted approximately two dozen places throughout the New Testament where I felt a change in translation left the English less accurate, without any gains in clarity. A somewhat larger number of changes moved the TNIV a little closer to functional equivalence at each point than its predecessor, though both versions were equally accurate. Again, in these instances, I could detect no gains in clarity and wished, therefore, that the translation had remained more formally equivalent. But none of these texts in either of these two categories had anything to do with the inclusive-language debate. And, as I mentioned at the outset, the number of places in which the TNIV translated *more* literally than NIV was about three times as large as the number in which the reverse occurred. There were also a handful of places where I could have wished the TNIV had made a change, but the older NIV reading was left untouched. Overall, however, I am very pleased with the results and look forward to using the TNIV in numerous settings. Now I can also encourage students to use a reliable inclusive-language translation of the Bible without their having to order it from London and both pay more and wait a much longer time before its arrival.

I do not expect a majority of the TNIV's critics ever to *like* the new translation or even to *use* it on any regular basis. It is a reasonable expectation, however, that its critics should treat it fairly.<sup>80</sup> Why have they not commented on the scores of places in which the TNIV is more literal and/or more accurate than the NIV completely apart from the inclusive-language debate, especially since their criticisms rely so heavily on valuing

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<sup>79</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew*, vol. 2 (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1991), 113, comments simply, “Matthew's impersonal plural (cf. 1.23; 5.15; 7.16) is Semitic.”

<sup>80</sup> Contrast, e.g., the Southern Baptist Convention's Resolution against the TNIV at its 2002 national meeting, which includes the wording that, “the TNIV makes significant changes to the NIV, largely in the area of gender language” (<http://www.sbcanualmeeting.net/sbc02/resolutions/sbcresolution.asp?ID=4>). The “largely” is simply false. As we have noted, more than 70% of the changes are unrelated to the inclusive-language debate and move in a *more* literal direction three times more often than not.

highly literal translations? The lists I have given in this paper merely scratch the surface by presenting what for me are the most interesting or significant examples; the actual lists that could be compiled are several times longer.

I also wish to close with a plea. Though I am sure it is not anyone's intention, the critics of the TNIV are making it harder for me to bring up my girls in the Christian faith and to be a faithful witness for Christ in a postmodern culture.<sup>81</sup> For one thing, many people see Christians once again squabbling about something they should not be and are repulsed.<sup>82</sup> Even more seriously, it is becoming harder to differentiate complementarianism (which I endorse) from the anti-inclusive language movement, because so many leaders of the former are joining the latter. For the majority of folks who do not understand the fine differences, it is becoming too easy simply to reject complementarianism altogether, assuming that the hostile polemic against translations like the TNIV is a necessary consequence of that position.

This was brought home to me dramatically, shortly after the NIVI came out, when we had an evangelistic service at our church that included a performance by our children's choir. At that time my older daughter was ten years old and sang in the choir. She invited an unsaved girlfriend of hers to come, and the girl seemed to enjoy the concert and follow our (now retired) Children's Ministry Director as she concluded the service with a very tasteful appeal to trust Christ. In so doing, however, she quoted 2 Cor. 5:17 out of the KJV (the translation she had used almost all her life): "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." At that point, my daughter's friend, who was sitting between my wife and me, leaned over to my wife and asked with disgust, "Does your church *always* use language like that?" Of course, we could have explained that the term was generic,<sup>83</sup> that even in the NIV which we normally used, "man" and "he" were not present, but the moment of spiritual openness was gone. She knew, from public school upbringing and

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<sup>81</sup> This is quite a different concern from the motive imputed to me by Ed Vitagliano, "New TNIV Translation Plays Fast and Loose with God's Word," *AFA Journal* (May 2002): 17. Vitagliano quotes my endorsement of the TNIV, in part on the basis that I want women to understand when the biblical language truly does address them, as appearing "to hint at the influence of political correctness." These concerns have *nothing* to do with political correctness but *everything* to do with "biblical correctness"!

<sup>82</sup> Cf., e.g., the publicity generated in the liberal Christian world by John Dart, "Gender and the Bible: Evangelicals Wrangle Over New Translations," *ChrCent* (July 3-10, 2002): 11-13.

<sup>83</sup> The only recourse that Poythress and Grudem (*The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, 223-32) permit.

from common parlance, that such language was neither common nor necessary, and therefore smacked of chauvinism. The woman who read the Scripture I'm sure had no clue what happened and I knew of no effective way to bring up the topic with her, because of her attitude over the years on this issue.

The incident is not an isolated one. This summer, in Ireland, after a presentation at a local church on the gender roles debate, I had a man who must have been at least in his thirties come up and object to my very “moderate” complementarian approach by pointing out how common masculine language was throughout Scripture, following the NIV, and that it seemed large parts of it were addressed only to men. In Colorado, as a guest teacher in an adult Sunday School at a nearby evangelical church, a woman who must have been in her fifties but was a new convert, asked me why the Proverbs were almost exclusively about and addressed to men. In another church, a long-time Christian challenged me when I suggested that there were *some* leadership roles appropriate for women in the church, by quoting Heb. 13:17 from the NIV: “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as *men* who must give an account.” I pointed out to him that there was no word for “men” in the Greek, only a generic masculine participle. He was surprised and agreed to reconsider his position. My girls, now fifteen and eleven, understand the gender-inclusive debate (in more detail than they care to given their father's work on this paper!) and can recognize gender-inclusive masculines in the NIV (or NASB which is our current pastor's version of choice), but it continues to sound both odd and exclusive to them whenever they hear it, because that is not how either their friends or their teachers talk.

Consistently inclusive-language translations of the Bible can easily help us avoid these problems. If the critics make it as hard to get or use the TNIV (especially without being labeled by someone as having gone “liberal” or “feminist”) as they did with the NIVI, the only alternative will be to support a non-evangelical translation like the NRSV (and even it is not consistently inclusive), which then creates other problems for evangelicals. I actually know a number of staunchly evangelical scholars on both sides of the Atlantic who have already done precisely this; to date I have resisted. The ESV and HCSB, with which many of the TNIV's critics have been involved and support, with

their very limited use of inclusive language, make some headway, but they do not go nearly far enough. Too many passages remain too misleading to contemporary readers.

We may wish the English language had not changed. We may point to places where it still has not changed.<sup>84</sup> But it is indisputable that it has changed substantially and continues to do so, particularly outside of the Southern United States. If we really want an authoritative, accurate *koinē* English translation, we must throw our support behind ventures like the TNIV and not establish such adversarial stances that we cannot help them in their further revision of parts we think can still be improved. To their credit, the framers of the CSG changed their views once before on what could count for them as legitimate inclusive-language translation, when they were presented with supporting Scriptural and linguistic evidence.<sup>85</sup> It is my fervent prayer that they will do so again, in view of the kind of information presented in this paper.<sup>86</sup>

Craig L. Blomberg  
Distinguished Professor of New Testament  
Denver Seminary, Denver, CO  
July 2002.

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<sup>84</sup> As in *ibid.*, 203-15.

<sup>85</sup> See *ibid.*, 312-15.

<sup>86</sup> It is sobering to be reminded that the people for whom Jesus and the apostles reserve their strongest condemnation are the conservative religious leaders of the first century who drew the boundaries of their faith too narrowly, not too broadly. See Craig L. Blomberg, "The New Testament Definition of Heresy (or When Do Jesus and the Apostles Really Get Mad?)," *JETS* 45 (2002): 59-72.