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### TNIV and its critics wage war over words

By Tony Cartledge

COLORADO SPRINGS, Colo. (ABP) -- The International Bible Society is preparing to publish a new Bible translation to sell alongside its popular New International Version, but many conservative evangelical leaders are hoping no one will buy it.

The new translation, to be called the Today's New International Version, was announced in January by the IBS and its publisher, Zondervan. The New Testament will become available this spring, with the Old Testament slated for release in 2005. Promotional copies of the New Testament are being distributed to retailers and to 50,000 pastors, educators and church leaders.

According to the IBS, the TNIV changes 7 percent of the 35-year-old NIV to reflect both "the development of language and advances in scholarship" and "changes that are occurring in everyday English."

A 15-member Committee on Bible Translation tweaked its earlier NIV in a number of areas, but critics focused quickly on changes to make the TNIV more "gender accurate" by translating masculine terms generically when the reference seems to include both men and women. For example, "man" might be replaced with "person," or "mankind" with "humankind." The singular "he" could be changed to "they" or "people" if the context indicated a universal application. Likewise, "brothers" could be translated as "brothers and sisters."

To opponents of the TNIV, the changes smack of political correctness and a bow to feminism. "This new publication is nothing more than acquiescence to feminists who are more concerned with the so-called language of 'equality' than they are with the message of the gospel of Christ," said Jerry Falwell in the March issue of his National Liberty Journal.

The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, an organization that promotes a literalist interpretation of family and gender issues as related in the Bible, published a short list of 26 translation changes it considered to be problematic, and a longer list of 100. Its Web site ([www.cbmw.org](http://www.cbmw.org)) offers a free booklet on "What's wrong with gender-inclusive translations."

Baptist Press responded to the IBS announcement with a string of articles about the TNIV, most of them reflecting either caution or criticism. Southern Baptist Theological Seminary President Albert Mohler told BP on Jan. 28 that "those who champion a feminist agenda will cheer the announcement of the TNIV," but "the moment we begin to translate the Bible so that it will be less offensive to one group or another, we insult the very character of the Bible as the eternal, inerrant and authoritative Word of God."

In the same article, Ken Hemphill, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, said, "Our mission is not to make the Bible relevant to culture but to bring culture under the rubric of Scripture."

James Smith, editor of the Florida Baptist Witness, warned readers against the TNIV in a Feb. 21 editorial. "Evangelicals hold to the verbal, plenary inspiration of scripture (2 Tim. 3:16) that includes every single word of the original texts," he said. "It's quite arrogant and extremely dangerous when human beings believe they can edit God's own words."

The IBS defended the TNIV in a five-page "open statement" on Feb. 12, describing members of the translation committee as "renowned, conservative linguists and biblical scholars from the most trusted institutions in the world."

"The TNIV upholds the same standards of accuracy, clarity and meticulous scholarship of the NIV," the statement said. "There is an academic, linguistic rationale for the translation of every passage."

The intensity of conservative opposition to the TNIV grows out of an earlier uprising in which some evangelical leaders exercised their influence to quash an IBS plan to introduce gender-neutral language to the NIV. In 1996, the IBS published an inclusive-language edition of the NIV in Europe, and was also producing a gender-neutral New International Reader's Version as a children's Bible in the U.S.

World, a conservative Christian magazine based in Asheville, N.C., reported in 1997 that the IBS and Zondervan planned to produce a gender-neutral version of the NIV for the U.S. market by 2001, touching off an avalanche of criticism from leading conservative evangelicals, including some Southern Baptists.

Facing pressure from critics and a potential boycott of its products, the IBS announced in 1997 that it would forego plans to introduce a version of the NIVi to the U.S. The IBS said it would also revise the NIV's gender language to reflect the NIV and negotiate an end to publishing the British NIVi.

In conjunction with that announcement, IBS and Zondervan officials signed the "Colorado Springs Guidelines," an agreement brokered in a daylong meeting by James Dobson of "Focus on the Family." The guidelines describe specific principles to guide translation of gender-related language in Scripture.

In its Jan. 28 press release, however, the IBS said it was withdrawing its endorsement of those guidelines because they "were not consistent with the guidelines produced by the International Forum of Bible Agencies or the guidelines of the Committee on Bible Translation."

The conflict is related to an ongoing discussion among Bible translators. Some hold that any translation should reflect the most literal meaning of the underlying words, a philosophy sometimes called "formal equivalence." Many conservatives favor the New American Standard Version because it is a largely literal translation.

Others prefer an approach known as "dynamic" or "functional" equivalence, in which the translation's main goal is to convey the original language's intent, even if it means a change to the specific wording or underlying idiom. The popular Today's English Version, published by the American Bible Society, follows this approach.

Translations such as the NIV tend to take a middle ground, staying as true to the text as possible while making changes deemed necessary to clarify underlying meanings.

The current debate thus is largely a matter of perspective: TNIV advocates say the changes in the translation of gender terms are a straightforward attempt to seek maximum clarity by keeping up with the evolving English language, while critics say the IBS has crossed the line from translation to interpretation.

But all translations involve some measure of interpretation. For example, the NIV translates Acts 20:30 as, "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them." The TNIV substitutes the indefinite pronoun "some" for the word "men," assuming that both men and women are capable of distorting the truth. An article on the CBMW Web site, however, argues that Paul could only have been addressing men because he was meeting with the "elders of the church" (20:17). Those who follow a literalist interpretation assume on the basis of other texts that women were excluded from being church elders.

The NIV translation of James 3:1 warns, "Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers." The underlying Greek has only the word meaning "brothers," but translators working on the TNIV added "and sisters," based on the assumption that both men and women could aspire to teaching. The CBMW finds fault both with the addition of a word not in the text, and with the implication "that James thought women could be Bible teachers in the early church."

"Unnecessarily changing the words of the biblical text in order to accommodate those who think certain phrases are offensive is dangerous and irresponsible," wrote Randy Stinson, executive director of CBMW on the group's Web site. "The question one must ask is, 'What will be next?'"

Steve Johnson, IBS president for communication and development, however, insists that the issue is not accommodation. "The overriding concern of the CBT is ALWAYS accuracy and clarity," he said in an e-mail to Baptist Press. "While there may be differences within the body on the specific rendering of Greek and Hebrew, the influence of social agenda into any translation is NEVER permitted.

"We regret that once again, the issue of providing God's Word to the next generation of English-speakers has become an issue of division in the Body of Christ."

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## **Southern Baptist-published Bible also uses gender-neutral approach**

By Tony Cartledge

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (ABP) -- Southern Baptist critics of the new Today's New International Version might be surprised to learn that LifeWay's new Holman Christian Standard Bible is also considerably more gender-inclusive than both the traditional King James Version and the modern New International Version.

Introduced in 1999 by the Southern Baptist Convention's publishing arm, the new Holman Bible is being marketed as a more accurate and readable Bible translation that still preserves the integrity of Scripture.

"Up until now, every English translation of the Bible has been a tradeoff between accuracy and readability. The more accurate it was, the harder it was to read, and the more reader-friendly it was, the more it drifted from a precise translation of the original text," Broadman and Holman President Kenneth Stephens said in an article distributed through Baptist Press. "With our Bible, we've eliminated the tradeoff."

But David Shepherd, vice president for Bible publishing, said the new translation would not follow the path of political correctness. "Some recent translations have reinterpreted the Bible to make it consistent with current trends and their own way of thinking," he said. "Current trends in Bible translation have been a real wake-up call for everybody who's concerned about preserving the integrity of Scripture. The (H)CSB will be under the stewardship of Christians who believe we should conform our lives and culture to the Bible -- not the other way around."

This vision, however, did not prevent HCSB translators from adopting a far more gender-neutral approach to language than the KJV and the NIV, according to a North Carolina pastor who has compared the translations.

David Stratton, pastor of Brunswick Islands Baptist Church in Supply, N.C., said he had noticed gender-neutral language in the HCSB and became curious when he saw the extensive criticism being leveled at the TNIV. He chose a sample of seven books in the New Testament (Mark, Acts, Romans, 1 Corinthians, 1 Thessalonians, James and Revelation). He read each book in the KJV, the NIV, the TNIV and the HCSB versions. The Old Testament is not yet available for either the HCSB or the TNIV.

Stratton first used the KJV as a baseline to flag gender language, and compared it to the other versions. He then read the same books a second time, using the NIV as the baseline for gender language.

In those seven books, he found 339 verses in which the HCSB is more gender-neutral than the KJV and/or the NIV, and 194 verses in which the HCSB is more gender-neutral than the NIV alone.

For example, in Mark 4:9, the KJV has, "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." The NIV has, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." The TNIV renders the phrase, "Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear." The HCSB reads, "Anyone who has ears to hear should listen!"

In Romans 2:16, Paul says God will judge the "secrets of men" (KJV). The NIV translates the phrase as "men's secrets," while the TNIV has "everyone's secrets" and the HCSB has "what people have kept secret."

For the familiar passage in James 5:16, the KJV refers to the "effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man." The NIV also has "righteous man." The TNIV translates as "a righteous person," while the HCSB avoids any gender reference with "the righteous."

In passages dealing with addresses to church leadership, however, the HCSB is more careful to preserve male terminology. For example, in Acts 20:30, where Paul addresses the elders of the church at Ephesus, the KJV says, "Also of your own selves shall men arise." The NIV renders it, "Even from your own number men will arise." The TNIV says "some" will arise, but the HCSB has "men from among yourselves will rise up."

Both the HCSB and the TNIV are careful to retain male pronouns like "he" and "him" that refer to God. However, the HCSB is actually more likely than the TNIV to translate masculine participles that refer to God in a gender-neutral manner.

For example, Rev. 1:4 speaks of "him which is, and which was, and which is to come" (KJV). The NIV translates "him who is, and who was, and who is to come," and the TNIV keeps the same reading. The HCSB, however, has "the One who is, who was, and who is coming."

Likewise, in a reference to God in Rom. 9:12, both the NIV and TNIV translate "him who calls." The HCSB uses the gender-neutral "the One who calls." Similar translations can be found in Acts 22:9 and a number of texts in Revelation, including 2:1, 8, 12; 3:1,7; 4:9,10; 5:1, 7, 13 and several others.

-- Tony Cartledge is editor of The Biblical Recorder.

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