

# **New International Version Completed**

*By John C. Jeske*

As this article is written on a bright July day, the news has just been received that the New International Version of the Bible will be dedicated in New York on September 30, 1978, and that the new translation will have been distributed to bookstores all over the country by October 30. This announcement represents the climax of a translation project whose history goes back some 20 years, although the actual work of translation took 11 years.

## **WELS Involvement in the NIV**

This announcement is of considerable interest to the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod because the synod has been involved in the preparation of the NIV in a number of different ways. Many individuals and groups within the synod made contributions to the New York International Bible Society, which over the past decade has accumulated an indebtedness of a million dollars in sponsoring the translation project.

The synod's involvement in the NIV, however, goes deeper than just the financial. In 1966, when translating committees were being organized, several members of the Mequon faculty were asked to participate. The sainted Frederic E. Blume served as New Testament consultant.

With the publication of the NIV New Testament late in 1973, WELS participation in the translation project accelerated. In January 1974, several months after the NIV-NT appeared, 45 members of the synod (including praesidium, publishing and editorial boards, language instructors, and seminary faculty) conducted a two-day Bible Translations Seminar. Called by the synod's Commission on Christian Literature (CCL), the Seminar was asked to advise the CCL in the matter of choosing a contemporary translation for possible use in the synod's publication program. Of the dozen contemporary Bible translations the Seminar scrutinized, the newest showed the greatest promise of being the version CCL was looking for. The NIV, which had appeared only two months earlier, had impressed the participants. The Seminar therefore requested the WLS faculty to proceed with an intensive study of the NIV-NT and to report its findings to the district conventions in the summer of 1974. The Seminar also resolved to offer the services of the synod's "language men" to the NIV translating committees.

After the WLS faculty completed its study of the NIV-NT it requested permission to present its recommendations for changes to the NIV authorities in person. In response to that request, a committee from the NIV, including the Executive Secretary, Dr. Edwin H. Palmer, visited Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary and met with faculty representatives. It was shortly after that visit that a faculty representative was asked to join the NIV translators. In the years since then, the entire seminary faculty has reviewed the tentative translations of individual Old Testament books as these were completed. Dr. Palmer has been generous in acknowledging the faculty's help. In the summer of 1976 he told the assembled translators: "We have received more constructive criticism from the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod than from any other church." And in a letter dated March 16, 1977, he stated: "The suggestions of your faculty continue to help us to have a tighter translation...."

The participation of our men in a transdenominational Bible translation project has on occasion raised questions. The writer has been asked: "Was your participation as a member of translation teams a purely professional exercise?" It could hardly be that for any Christian Bible student. The next question was: "If your participation was an exercise of your faith, is such action in conformity with the synod's stated position on church fellowship?"

The seminary faculty and board were convinced there was no conflict, as long as our representative was not expected to take part in joint devotions. Outside the framework of fellowship joint discussion of scriptural doctrine and of controverted issues with men of varying confessions is a God-pleasing testimony to the truth, provided such participation does not show indifference to the truth or appear to give error in the church the status of truth. Finally a good Bible translation is something we want and ought to work for.

## The Procedure

The group of translators who worked on the NIV project was the largest ever assembled to work on a Bible translation. The complete list, including those translators who worked for only a short time, numbers about 100. To a man, they could be classified as conservative evangelicals. To insure his commitment to a high view of the Scripture, each translator signed a statement that "... the Bible alone, in its entirety, is the Word of God written and is therefore inerrant in the autographs." Here, then, were men who had taken their stand against the historical-critical method and who had made their convictions public. There was an impressive array of language gifts in evidence at the meetings of translation committees. Several translators have written textbooks, eg., on Old Testament introduction, which are recommended reading at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary.

During the last four years of the project—the years when the bulk of the Old Testament was translated—there was only one Lutheran serving as member of any of the translating teams. Obviously, then, since no team members were Catholic or Jewish, a sizable proportion of the membership came from church bodies with Calvinistic orientation. A natural question would be: Does the NIV tend to favor translations that support Calvinism?

The writer doesn't have the final answer to that question. He can say that the committees on which he served strove consciously and conscientiously to avoid translations that slanted the reader's understanding toward a particular theological system. For example, when the translation committee was working on Exodus 7:13, it was pointed out that the KJV translation of the verb  $\text{קָשָׁה}$  ("he hardened Pharaoh's heart") definitely favors the Calvinistic system, since the antecedent of the pronoun "he" must surely be the Lord. According to KJV, then, when Moses and Aaron for the very first time appeared before Pharaoh to demand Israel's release, a visit that may have been Pharaoh's first direct contact with the message from Jehovah and with the authenticating signs, the Lord hardened the king's heart. Here, surely, is support for Calvin's double election, according to which God from eternity had predestined Pharaoh to spend eternity in hell.

The NIV translating committee realized that the Hebrew verb in Exodus 7:13 is not a transitive verb at all, as KJV renders it, but a stative verb (describing a state or condition). Furthermore, the word "heart" is not the direct object but the subject of the verb. The committee therefore translated: "Pharaoh's heart became hard and he would not listen to them." Here was a conscious attempt to translate the Hebrew text without showing the favoritism to Calvinistic exegesis which the KJV translation of that passage seems to. The Exodus record presents hardening as a judgment of God that confirms the action of an individual in persistently rejecting God's message to him. In the case of Pharaoh, this confirming judgment of God is not recorded until Exodus 9:12.

Many of the NIV translators are Sabbatarians, and yet the question "How do I interpret the Scripture?" had to yield to the more important question "What does the text say?" The translation of Exodus 16:23 is a case in point. According to KJV, Moses said to the Israelites en route to Mt. Sinai: "Tomorrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the Lord." The definite article before "sabbath" infers that there was a sabbath in force even before God announced the Third Commandment from Mt. Sinai. That misconception is removed in the NIV translation of that passage: "Tomorrow is to be a day of rest, a holy Sabbath to the Lord."

These examples are cited to show that NIV translators made a conscious effort to be faithful to the text and to avoid favoring one's own denominational viewpoint.

Unlike many contemporary Bible translations, the NIV is a committee translation. Since this committee structure affected the finished product, it ought perhaps be described. Each book of the Bible was assigned to an Initial Translation Team made up of two or three men with special familiarity with that book. Their translation was, in turn, submitted to several editorial committees. It went first to a five-man Intermediate Editorial Committee, which checked the translation for accuracy and for style. At the next stage, the translation was sent to a five-man General Editorial Committee, which reviewed the previous work verse by verse. The previous translation was actually debated word by word. "Is this exactly what the Hebrew says? And is this the best way of saying it?" Finally the 15-member Committee on Bible Translation examined the work, considering the

suggestions made by numerous critics and stylists. This time-consuming process of editorial revision is unique among contemporary Bible translations.

As can be inferred from the preceding, the pace of an NIV translation committee was slow. Seven verses per hour was par for the course. Many of the decisions reached every day were major. (“What is the best reading of the ancient text?” “What is the precise distinction between these two synonyms?” “Is there an ancient idiom here that we’re missing?”) By contrast, some details of translation might seem quite minor. (“Should we capitalize the ‘s’ in ‘spirit’ or not?” “How should we punctuate the sentence?”) One can only speculate how much misunderstanding in the church has been caused by the comma the KJV mistakenly placed after “saints” in Ephesians 4:12 (cf. NIV: “... to prepare God’s people for works of service”). And, as often occurs when five people are voting, decisions reached were not always unanimous. The NIV estimates that, from start to finish, 170 man-hours have been invested in every chapter of the Bible. (That figure, incidentally, includes only time spent by members of translating committees; it would not include, e.g., the 5000 man-hours the WLS faculty has spent in reviewing the NIV Old and New Testaments and in formulating suggestions for change).

The first job of every NIV translation committee deserves special mention. Before they could translate a passage, the committee members had to be sure of the original wording they were to translate. One by-product of the publication of contemporary Bible translations is the interest that has been aroused in the minds of lay Christians in textual criticism. More and more people are asking: “Exactly what was the text inspired by the Holy Spirit through the holy men of God?” The reader has met the simplistic view that the KJV is the verbally inspired Word of God, from front cover to back, and that if one dares to change a single word he is attacking God’s Word and placing himself under the judgment of Revelation 22:18f. The experience of the recent past has again taught us that Christian faith is not so fragile that it will be shaken and shattered if one points out that the Hebrew or Greek text from which a translator works—be he 16th Century German, 17th Century English, or 20th Century American—is a reconstructed text, since we have none of the autographs of the sacred books.

The NIV translators worked from an eclectic Hebrew/Greek text. They recognized with gratitude that no other piece of ancient literature has so much manuscript support as the Scriptures of Old and New Testament, and they treated all of the ancient witnesses to the original text with respect. They avoided the theory, so popular in earlier New Testament textual studies, which gave three major textual resources disproportionate weight: Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, and Alexandrinus. The translators of the NIV New Testament paid close attention, e.g., to the papyri discovered in the Eastern Mediterranean area in the years since 1900 and gladly used the help they offer in establishing the reading of the original text.

Similarly, translators on NIV Old Testament committees used the Isaiah Scroll discovered 30 years ago in one of the caves on the west shore of the Dead Sea, an ancient Isaiah manuscript a thousand years earlier than the manuscript from which the KJV translators worked. Surely it would be rank ingratitude for a child of God to tell God: “I don’t need that gift, and I don’t intend to use it!” And yet isn’t that what many a misinformed Christian is saying these days by emphasizing that the *Textus Receptus*, the text from which the KJV translators worked, is the only legitimate Scripture? Perhaps there was a time when a pastor felt no need to become better acquainted with matters of ancient manuscripts and with claims made for the *Textus Receptus*, but that time is long gone. Any alert pastor in these last decades of the 20th Century will want to have done his homework so as not to be caught off guard when a parishioner asks him: “Pastor, why does this new translation leave out a verse of God’s Word?”

There may be disappointment, perhaps a sense of loss, when the Epistle for the first Sunday in Trinity is read, and we miss the pronoun “him” in the passage: “We love because he first loved us” (1 Jn 4:19). There may be surprise when the reader reads Genesis 47:21 in the NIV and compares it with KJV. The NIV translators followed the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint in reading וַיִּקְנֶה יְהוָה אֶת יִשְׂרָאֵל instead of וַיִּקְנֶה יִשְׂרָאֵל (v.19: “Buy us ... and we will be slaves to Pharaoh.” v.21: “... and Joseph made slaves of the people ...”)\* Lacking the autographs, the translators recognized that their first assignment was to establish the ancient text, using any and all resources a merciful God has placed into our hands. It is the hope of the NIV translators that such careful attention to

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\* NIV OT quotations are taken from the last published committee translation, and do not take into account any last-minute revisions.

details of the ancient text, and such meticulous checking and rechecking of tentative translations, have resulted in a finely honed and well-balanced translation.

### The Product

Dr. John Stott, personal chaplain to the Queen of England, has summarized what one looks for in a translation of the Bible: 1) humble reverence before the sacred text; 2) scholarly familiarity with the theology, background, and languages of the Bible; and 3) cultural sensitivity in the search for a dynamic equivalent which is both faithful and felicitous. In Dr. Stott's view, the NIV New Testament "seems to reflect an outstanding combination of these three qualities." The reader will want to reach his own conclusions about the NIV Old Testament. Perhaps this article can offer some considerations which will assist the reader in making this evaluation.

#### *A good translation—precise*

NIV translators strove for accuracy, for precision in their translation. Since everything God has told us about Himself is contained in the vocabulary and syntax of the Bible, these were two areas of prime concentration. KJV translates Genesis 4:1: "I have gotten a man from the LORD." That has to be an incorrect translation, since the Hebrew word *מֵ* does not mean "from." It may be a preposition meaning "with," or it may be an untranslated particle indicating the definite direct object. Similarly, the verb in the sentence (from the root *קנה*) may have one of two meanings. It may mean "to produce," "to create," or it may mean "to acquire." If the translator chooses to translate the verb "produce," he'll have to translate *מֵ* as a preposition. NIV opts for this and translates: "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man." If, on the other hand, he chooses to translate the verb "acquire," the *מֵ* would then have to be taken as the sign of the direct object. Luther opted for this: "*Ich habe den Mann, den Herrn.*"

In Genesis 6:4 the translator faces the Hebrew word *גִּבְיִלִים*. He's at a loss, since we don't know what the word means. KJV perpetuates the Septuagint's translation *gigantes*, which makes room for the mythological idea of angels' marrying humans and producing giant offspring. To be sure, this is an interpretation of Genesis 6 which finds considerable support among contemporary advocates of form criticism. The NIV translators didn't know what the Hebrew term means, but they eliminated the offensive word "giants" by translating: "The Nephilim were on earth in those days," leaving it to the teacher to suggest that these were probably tyrants, not necessarily men of large physical stature.

Genesis 2:7 has often been misquoted in Christian classrooms to prove that, unlike the animals, man has a soul. NIV's translation is surely more precise: "Man became a living being."

According to the KJV translation of Genesis 3:5, Satan offered this inducement to Eve to follow him: "... ye shall be as gods." The NIV translates the Hebrew *אֲלֹהִים* "... you will be like God." A minor change, perhaps, but a change in the interest of greater precision. Polytheism surely isn't in the picture in Genesis 3.

A major benefit which the NIV brings to the reader of Genesis is an accurate translation of the technical term *תולדות* (Gn 2:4; 5:1; 6:8; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). These ten *תולדות* are the ten "histories" into which the subject matter from Genesis 2:4 to the end of the book is divided. Ten times in Genesis Moses introduces a subject and then follows that introduction by saying: "Now here is the *toledoth*, the subsequent history, of that previously named subject." KJV consistently translates "generations," an unhappy rendering because it suggests "genealogy." NIV consistently translates "account." (By contrast, AAT is inconsistent: "history" three times, "record of descendants" twice, "descendants" five times).

Exodus 34:33 reads in KJV: "... and till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a veil on his face." This translation conveys the mistaken impression that Moses wore a veil on his face while he brought God's Law to the people at Mt. Sinai, in order to hide the reflection of the glory of the LORD (as a concession to the fears and weakness of the people). NIV corrects this mistaken impression: "*When* Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face." 2 Corinthians 3:13 supplies the reason why he did this.

A good example of the accuracy for which the NIV strives is its rendering of a play on words in the blessings pronounced by the patriarch Isaac on his twin sons Jacob and Esau (Gn 27:28,39). When blessing his sons, Isaac used the same expression twice with different meanings. (The Hebrew is מִטֵּל which is the preposition מִן “from,” plus the noun טֵל “dew”). KJV translates “of the dew” in both passages, indicating that the translators failed to recognize the play on words. Isaac’s words to Jacob (27:28) involve a partitive מִן, and KJV translates correctly. But Isaac’s words to Esau involve a מִן of separation; the patriarch was predicting that Esau’s future home, the land of Edom, would be a dry land, unsuited to agriculture. NIV translates 27:39: “Your dwelling will be away from earth’s richness, *away from the dew* of heaven above.” A small detail, perhaps, but attention to small details can make or break a translation.

The translation of the Hebrew word עֵי offers another example of NIV’s striving for precision in translation. The ancient Hebrew documents uncovered half a century ago at Ugarit, on the north Syrian coast, make much use of the emphatic עֵי (also called the asseverative עֵי). Isaiah 15:1 can serve an example. KJV translates the עֵי as a causal particle: “The burden of Moab. *Because* in the night Ar of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence; *because* in the night Kir of Moab is laid waste, and brought to silence...” NIV recognizes that the context does not allow for a causal particle; the עֵי must therefore be emphatic, and so it translates:

An oracle concerning Moab.

*Ar in Moab is ruined,  
destroyed in a night!  
Kir in Moab is ruined,  
destroyed in a night!*

A New Testament example of the precision of translation for which the NIV strove is John 21:15–17. During that meaningful scene on the shore of Galilee, Jesus asked Simon Peter three questions, each time asking less than he had asked the previous time. NIV tries to capture the subtle difference in meaning between ἀγαπᾷς (“Do you truly love me ...?”) and φιλέω (“... I love you.”), as well as the difference between βόσκει (“Feed my lambs”) and ποιμαίνε (“Take care of my sheep”).

Matters of Messianic prophecy deserve special comment, since this area of Scripture will be one of the touchstones by which the new translation will be evaluated in our circles. One of the first criticisms of the *Revised Standard Version* when it came out 30 years ago was that the Messianicity of half of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies was lost. Given the conservative evangelical orientation of the NIV translators, it will not surprise you that Messianic prophecies come out Messianic in the NIV Old Testament.

Think of the promises God made to Abraham (Gn 12:3; 18:18; 22:18), to Isaac (26:4), and to Jacob (28:14). Although St. Paul translates the verb in all these passages as a passive (“... in thee shall all nations be blessed,” Ga 3:8), yet the *New English Bible* takes the Gospel out of these passages by translating the verb as reflexive (“All families on earth will pray to be blessed as you are blessed”). NIV quite properly retains the passive: “All peoples on earth will be blessed through you.”

NIV’s rendering of Genesis 49:10 will be a disappointment to some. NIV chose to follow the Septuagint in reading the Hebrew shiloh as a relative clause (“... he to whom it belongs ...”) instead of as the proper name of a person (“Shiloh”). In the NIV rendering the Messiah is described not as “Shiloh” but as the one to whom particular rights and prerogatives belong.

#### *A good translation—idiomatic*

After the translator has determined the intended meaning of the original text with precision, he must express this intended meaning in a manner that agrees with the speech habits of the receptor language (Luther: “*den gemeinen Mann aufs Maul sehen*”). Part of the problem many Christians have with the KJV is traceable to the fact that the KJV Old Testament renders the Hebrew to a considerable extent *word for word* rather than idiomatically, a procedure that often results in quaintness or awkwardness, and not infrequently in obscurity.

Examples of good idiomatic renderings in the NIV Old Testament are “the poorest of the poor” (Is 14:30) instead of KJV’s literalistic “the firstborn of the poor,” and “... a feast of rich food, a banquet of aged wine” (Is 25:6) in place of KJV’s “... a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees.”

There is something in all of us that resists change, and the reader will not agree that in every instance NIV’s renderings are more idiomatic than KJV’s. John 3:30 may be a case in point: “He must increase, but I must decrease.” There’s a certain rhythm to those words, even rhyme (more even than the Greek ἀξάνειν ἐλαττοῦσθαι). But is the KJV rendering really superior to NIV’s “He must become greater; I must become less important”? “Increase ... decrease” is actually not an American idiom. Who of us has ever said: “The Democrats have increased, but the Republicans have decreased”?

As the NIV committees strove for a translation that is accurate and at the same time idiomatic, they faced the problem of how to translate theological terminology. Do you simply translate קָדַשׁ and δικαιοῦν “justify” and expect people to know (or to learn) what the term means? Or do you explain, define, paraphrase, produce a *Bible in Basic English*, and then eliminate the difficult Latinisms from our catechisms and dogmatics textbooks? The NIV chose to steer a middle course. A technical term unfamiliar to many was defined the first time it appeared. After that the term itself was used. Take the term “justify” in Romans 3. In verse 20 NIV translates: “No one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the Law.” (KJV: “By deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight.”) Then in verse 24 NIV uses the term it had defined: “(All) are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus,” and in verse 28: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law.” The pastor who assigns verse 28 for memorization can have the student refer back to verse 20 for the definition.

The same translation philosophy is evident in the treatment of the term “unleavened bread” in Exodus 12. In 12:8 and 15 Moses tells the Israelites that they are to eat “bread made without yeast,” and in 12:17 he commands them: “Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread.” Again in 12:20 NIV quotes Moses as saying: “Eat nothing made with yeast. Wherever you live, you must eat unleavened bread.”

### *A good translation—beautiful*

Still another goal of the NIV translators was to produce a translation that has beauty. Here we again enter upon a highly subjective area, and there will not be general agreement. A conscious attempt was made to preserve the rhythm of the original, the flow, the rise and fall. The translators paid attention to the effect connectives have in linking the various members of a passage. According to KJV, Isaiah 17:13 warns that God’s enemies are “chased as the chaff of the mountains before the wind, and like a rolling thing before the whirlwind.” NIV has them “driven before the wind like chaff on the hills, like tumbleweed before a gale.”

Interrupt your reading of this article for ten minutes to read Nahum chapter 3, first in the KJV and then in NIV. One of those translations will impress you with its beauty and its vigor.

In striving to produce a beautiful translation, NIV translators tried to remember that the Old Testament should sound like the Old Testament. “House of Jacob” (Is 2:5) was chosen in preference to “family of Jacob” or “people of Jacob.” For vividness, names of members of the body were retained in the translation if at all possible. “Wise in their own eyes” (Is 5:21) was preferred to “wise in their own sight.” John 14:1 (which AAT translates “Don’t feel troubled”) is translated: “Do not let your hearts be troubled.”

There is a fullness to Hebrew expression which adds beauty and ought to be retained even when translated into American idiom. The General Editorial Committee translating Isaiah 19:22 had recommended: “The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague, and then heal them.” The final review committee (CBT) eliminated the telescoping and restored the passage to read: “The LORD will strike Egypt with a plague; he will strike them, and heal them.”

Translators were advised to avoid colloquialisms. Shirt-sleeved casualness was considered inappropriate for an earnest message from the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth to his creatures. Contractions were normally not used when God addressed his people. In the same way a novel expression which called attention to itself was considered inappropriate. The translators frequently turned away from a wording which was so contemporary that it was considered faddish, perhaps easily outdated in ten or twenty years.

If the original word has a color of its own, the translation sought to bring it out. Matthew 23:37 reads: “O Jerusalem, Jerusalem ... how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing” (KJV: “... how often would I have gathered ... her chickens ... and ye would not”). The NIV translation of I John 3:6 strives to make the verb tenses speak more clearly and colorfully: “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” (KJV: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not; whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him”).

Isaiah 22:5 describes the day of the Lord’s judgment with an uncanny assonance (מְבוֹרָה, מְבוֹרָה, מְבוֹרָה). KJV translates: “For it is a day of trouble and of treading down and of perplexity by the LORD God of hosts ...” In an attempt to capture the forcefulness of the Hebrew original NIV translates: “The Lord, the LORD Almighty, has a day of tumult and trampling and terror...”

The NIV attempted to catch and transmit the flavor of each individual passage, as, e.g., in the mocking criticism Judah’s leaders directed at Isaiah (28:10). Read the following two translations, and decide for yourself which one better conveys the complaint that Isaiah’s preaching was only a deluge of irritating laws and unrelated bits and pieces of information:

“For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept:  
line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little.”

“For it is: Do and do, do and do:  
rule on rule, rule on rule,  
a little here, a little there.”

If the cadences of the KJV were too good to lose, the NIV translators kept them. Congregations adopting the NIV for use in the worship service will be aware of the attempt to preserve a certain historic familiarity. “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Mt 11:28–30). “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand” (Jn 10:27f). “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. There are many rooms in my Father’s house; otherwise, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (Jn 14:1–3). The reader or hearer can sense the translator’s conscious effort to provide a translation that is beautiful and fresh, and yet somehow familiar.

#### *A good translation—clear*

If the cadences of KJV were too good to lose, NIV kept them. There are some cadences of KJV, however, that no one will miss. David’s word, “The house that is to be builded must be exceeding magnificent” (1 Chr 22:5) is one of those. For all of its stateliness, it’s antique. “Be thou for the people to God-ward” (Ex 18:19) is quaint. “(Christ) is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hb 2:18) could certainly bring a smile to a misunderstanding teen-member of the congregation. “Strangers shall fade away; and they shall be afraid out of their close places” (2 Sm 22:46) is literal but obscure. The NIV translators sought to produce a translation that is clear.

If the meaning of the original text is clear, the translation should not be ambiguous. KJV translates 2 Corinthians 5:14: “The love of Christ constraineth us.” The translation is ambiguous. Is the love that’s referred to *my* love for Christ or *his* love for me? It would, of course, have been possible for the NIV translators to leave the passage ambiguous and to let the reader decide. But why leave it ambiguous if you’re convinced the apostle intended Χριστοῦ to be a subjective genitive? NIV therefore translates: “Christ’s love compels us.”

On the other hand, when the many NIV translators were not sure of a correct interpretation, they left the translation ambiguous. How would you have translated Revelation 1:1 (“The revelation of Jesus Christ”), as a subjective or objective genitive? Is John speaking of the revelation that came from Jesus Christ or a revelation about Jesus Christ? The translators did not know, and under those conditions to have opted for one or the other would have foreclosed one option for the reader or interpreter. “The revelation of Jesus Christ” is NIV’s translation.

### Evaluation

It was mentioned above that four years ago the WLS faculty was directed to make a thorough study of the NIV New Testament. Four months later the faculty reported: “On the basis of the best critical texts available, the rendering of this new version was studied in its entirety with regard to a proper understanding of the apostolic Word and an adequate translation of that understanding into the language of our time. The considered judgment of the Seminary’s faculty is that the NIV NT surpasses by far any other published rendering as an adequate contemporary translation.” At the same time, the faculty submitted a list of about 20 New Testament passages where it felt the NIV translation was misleading and should be changed. We know that some of these suggestions have been adopted. Since we have not seen the final revision of the NIV New Testament, however, we do not know whether all of our concerns have been satisfied. Unfortunately, because of the financial pressures brought to bear on the New York International Bible Society by its mounting indebtedness, the pace of translation had to be accelerated and the term shortened. Consequently, the WLS faculty has not had the opportunity to review all of the Old Testament translations before the publication deadline. Of those Old Testament books it has seen and studied, the faculty shares the feelings it had about the NIV New Testament.

A comment might be in place about the package in which this new translation has come to us. Every effort has been made to make the outward appearance of the NIV as pleasing as possible. The text is printed in paragraph format, with headings for larger units. To enhance readability, the publishers asked a well-known book designer to create a page design that would have dignity and character, in addition to clarity. Various editions are planned, in single and double columns.

Over the past several years, the writer has been involved in discussing contemporary Bible translations with more than 75 congregations and groups throughout the synod. It is quite apparent that there is a greater impatience with unintelligible translations today than was observable, say, ten years ago. Many people—including a surprising number past middle age—have confessed privately that for years they have been bothered in conscience by their inability to read the Bible intelligently and in quantity, especially the Old Testament. Perhaps even more significantly, a number of pastors have confessed to having difficulty reading the Old Testament prophetic and wisdom books. There is without doubt a greater readiness today than there was a decade ago to accept a contemporary Bible translation not only for personal study but for liturgical purposes as well. Several pastors and teachers who have already been making memory assignments from the NIV have reported that students prefer memorizing Bible passages from a version they can understand more readily.

It seems that we are, and for the foreseeable future will be, in a transitional period not altogether unlike the German-to-English transition of the Twenties and Thirties. Many Lutheran Christians feel that they can do a better job of extending and conserving true Lutheran doctrine by using a Bible version that speaks to our generation with more directness and with greater clarity.

It is obvious to all that NIV is not a perfect translation, but neither is any of the other translations presently available to us. That alternative God has withheld from us, and for us to wait before taking any decisive action until a perfect translation appears would be unrealistic. It may be too early to tell whether NIV will be for the coming generation what KJV was for the present generation and what the *Lutherbibel* was for a previous generation. But with a few necessary revisions the NIV will be a distinct blessing to God’s people.