

The NIV Study Bible and Concordia Self-Study Bible, A Review*

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The past year two study Bibles have been published which may well be of interest to our readers. The first is *The NIV Study Bible* (hereafter NSB). A group of 50 evangelical Bible scholars, most of whom were NIV translators, spent seven years preparing nearly 20,000 study notes. There are introductions and outlines for each Bible book. Scores of maps, charts, diagrams and illustrations are usually located in the text on the pages to which they refer. Full-color timelines of both the Old and New Testaments are provided.

Subsequent to the publication of NSB the *Concordia Self-Study Bible* (hereafter CSSB) appeared, identical in format and typography to the earlier Zondervan publication but under the sponsorship of Concordia Publishing House. The CSSB retains all of the NSB's maps and charts and diagrams in the body of the text; the set of colored maps in the rear of the book, however, has been completely redone. The most significant change is that four professors at Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, have reworked many of the study notes to make this, in the words of the Foreword, "a Lutheran edition of *The NIV Study Bible*."

A strong point of both study Bibles is their firm rejection of the negative critical view of the Scripture. A few examples will illustrate. Both uphold the traditional 15th century date for the exodus. "There is no compelling reason to modify in any substantial way the traditional 1446 B.C. date for the exodus of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage" (p 84). Similarly, both study Bibles support the early dating of the book of Daniel. "The book was probably completed about 530 B.C., shortly after the capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539" (p 1298, NSB; 1301, CSSB). The chart appended to Daniel 7 identifies the four kingdoms referred to by Daniel as the Babylonian, Medo-Persian, Greek and Roman. (Adherents of a 165 B.C. date for the composition of Daniel usually maintain that the four empires of Daniel 2 and 7 must be Babylon, Media, Persia and Greece.) Exodus 6:3 is a passage which historical-critical scholars have again recently interpreted as saying that the name Yahweh was not known until later in Israel's history. Both study Bibles append this footnote to Exodus 6:3: "This does not necessarily mean that the patriarchs were totally ignorant of the name Yahweh ('the LORD'), but it indicates that they did not understand its full implications...."

A special introduction in the CSSB informs the reader at the outset which teachings of Scripture govern the interpretations that distinguish this Lutheran edition. Separate mini-articles list and define the following seven teachings: The Grace of God; Through Faith Alone; Scripture Alone; Law and Gospel; Word and Sacrament; Means of Grace; and Christology.

The CSSB also adds several significant paragraphs to the introductions supplied for each Bible book. One paragraph spells out how God's grace is taught in each book. A second paragraph summarizes Luther's comments on the book. In its introductions to a number of books, the CSSB makes a number of other changes. The paragraph about the contents of Romans, eg., is revised. In the introduction to Revelation, CSSB has additional information about the author, and the paragraph on the interpretation of Revelation is amplified to show why the historicist interpretation is the correct one.

The greatest number of changes in CSSB have been made in the exegetical footnotes, and here only a sampling can be offered. More than 60 changes were made in the notes on Genesis, many of them minor. NSB's "story" (eg., "the story of the flood") is consistently changed to "account." Many of CSSB's changes constitute a definite improvement. In Genesis 6:2 NSB's statement, "'sons of God' possibly refers to godly men ...," is changed to read, "'Sons of God' probably refers to godly men." In 6:17, NSB's comment, "Some believe that the deluge was worldwide," is changed to, "The universal terms of the text both here and elsewhere—... indicate that the deluge was worldwide."

Not all of CSSB's changes, however, will strike the reader as changes for the better. NSB comments on Genesis 1:5: "Some say the the creation days were 24-hour days, others that they were indefinite periods."

* *The NIV Study Bible*, Kenneth Barker, General Editor. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985. 2174 pp, \$33.95.

Concordia Self-Study Bible, Robert G. Hoerber, General Editor. St. Louis: Concordia, 1986. 2195 pp, \$34.95.

CSSB's emendation is equally misleading: "The first day was reckoned from evening to morning . . .," a comment which ignores the fact that the first day consisted of a light period followed by a period of darkness.

NSB comments on Genesis 6:3, "The verse seems to announce that the period of grace between God's declaration of judgment and its arrival would be 120 years." This comment is surely to be preferred to CSSB's emended comment, "The verse seems to announce that man's life span would henceforth be limited to 120 years."

CSSB's comment on Isaiah 7:14 will disappoint many Lutherans: "Matthew 1:23 understood the woman mentioned here to be a type (a foreshadowing) of the Virgin Mary.... 'Immanuel' ... may be another name for Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz," Isaiah's younger son. But his mother was no virgin, and Isaiah's son was not God with us.

An area which will be a distinct disappointment to Lutheran readers is NSB's treatment of the Messianic psalms. This becomes even more disappointing when one finds the same shortcoming in the "Lutheran edition." In Psalm 2:2, eg., the NIV text properly capitalizes "Anointed One." But the note to this verse in both the NSB and CSSB says: "The psalm refers to the Davidic king and is ultimately fulfilled in Christ." In the light of verses 8 and 12, which can refer only to the Messiah, such a comment from Lutheran commentators is inexcusable.

CSSB's note to Psalm 110 makes the untenable comment, "It may be, however, that David composed the psalm for the coronation of his son Solomon, calling him 'my lord' (v. 1) in view of his new status which placed him above the aged David." In Matthew 22:41–45, however, Jesus tells us clearly whom David was calling "his Lord."

The comments on Psalm 16 are equally disappointing. In spite of what Peter says in Acts 2:29–31 that David who died and was buried was speaking not about himself but about Christ, CSSB says re verses 9–11: "David speaks here, as in the rest of his psalms, first of all of himself ..." CSSB's note to Psalm 22 calls it "the anguished prayer of David as a godly sufferer ..." Despite the psalmist's clear statements in verses 1, 16 and 18, the author of this note does not recognize the psalm as direct Messianic prophecy speaking only about Christ and not David. George Stoeckhardt, highly respected Missouri Synod exegete of a former generation, made this comment about Psalm 22: "To all who read this psalm the truth simply jumps out that here the suffering and glorified Messiah speaks all of the words of the psalm.... Contemporary exegetes who see in these words the suffering of David, and who see only a type of Christ's sufferings ... have a veil over their eyes" (Stoeckhardt, *Selected Psalms* 57f.). On this score the CSSB's introduction to the book of Psalms is also less than satisfactory.

CSSB made over 300 changes in footnotes which accompany the text of the New Testament. It is interesting to note that a third of these changes are in the book of Revelation, and only forty in the four Gospels and Acts. Of the 300 changes, about a third are new notes which the NSB did not have (CSSB is about twenty pages longer than NSB). Some of the 300 New Testament changes, again, are minor in nature. In eleven instances where NSB had presented several possible interpretations as acceptable, CSSB singles out the only correct interpretation. About a dozen times NSB used the term "sovereign" in referring to God; CSSB drops this term. Strangely, in about ten instances the expression "through faith" is changed to "by faith."

In other instances the changes CSSB introduces are corrections of errors in doctrine. About a dozen changes involve the error of millennialism; a lengthy note on the subject is added at Revelation 20. Another dozen changes point out that the sacraments are means of grace and not mere signs of faith. Several changes eliminate the statement that in election God chose those he foreknew would believe (eg., Ro 8:29; 1 Tm 2:4). A number of changes correct notes in the NSB which imply that all the Jews will eventually be saved. Changes were made in unclear or erroneous notes which spoke about repentance and conversion as being man's response to God's initiative (eg., Lk 24:47; Jn 6:44; 17:2; Ro 8:28). Over twenty changes were made in passages involving the doctrine of justification (eg., Ac 20:32; Ro 2:6; 3:24; 5:10; 5:12–21; 6:1–8:39; 10:4; 2 Co 5:21; Col 1:20; 1 Tm 2:7). Some of these changes involve notes about the meaning of the word "saints" or the use of terminology such as the "saved" and the "unsaved"; most of the changes correct the denial of objective justification which is inherent in the expression that God made salvation "available" to all people.

One wishes that one could report that the CSSB has cleared up all the errors in doctrine in the NSB. In checking all the footnotes in just one NT book, however, several objectionable notes were found in the CSSB which are unchanged from the NSB. One essentially denies objective justification by speaking of only “believing” Jews and Gentiles when explaining Ephesians 2:14. Another teaches wrongly about the “old self” in the Christian (Eph 4:22, 24). But in a revision such as this with so many changes to make, some of the less obvious errors like these perhaps slipped through unnoticed or were left untouched in order to concentrate on the most obvious errors, neither of which should, of course, have occurred in such vital matters.

What is more disappointing, however, are some changes made in the CSSB which are objectionable. For example, in 2 Thessalonians 2 the interpretation that the Antichrist is the papacy is called a Lutheran tradition which is “a historical judgment and not a scriptural truth.” In 1 Timothy 2 the fact that Paul’s words about the role of man and woman are not historically conditioned is referred to as a “Lutheran tradition” instead of pointing out that Paul’s words are an application by an apostle of the scriptural principle of God’s order of creation.

Less serious, but still objectionable are some added notes such as these: notes which introduce what might be called guesses (eg., Lk 6:14–16, about the order of the disciples’ names; Ac 13:9, about the origin of Paul’s Gentile name; Ga 6:11, about Paul’s poor handwriting); notes which drop what were helpful comments in NSB (eg., Ac 7:38, about Saul’s part in Stephen’s death; Ac 10:47, about speaking in tongues; Ga 2:1, about Acts 15 being a possibility for this visit; and notes which deny what might very well be possible (eg., 1 Co 12:10, that the speaking in tongues in Corinth is the same phenomenon as at Pentecost; Ga 2:15–21, that these verses are part of Paul’s statement to Peter).

On balance, there is no question that CSSB is better than NSB simply because the questionable or erroneous notes are far fewer. When one compares the new CSSB with the older Roehrs-Franzmann *Concordia Self-Study Commentary* (CSSC), the choice is harder. Since each has its unique strengths, a pastor might consider getting both. The CSSB has the NIV text with footnotes, and it has numerous helpful charts and maps in the text as well as a good concordance and four-color maps at the rear of the book. The CSSC has only notes about the text, but especially in the OT the notes are generally more helpful and are also somewhat more reliable doctrinally. In the NT the notes in the CSSB take up more points in the individual verses; the CSSC is more helpful with the line of thought (especially in the Epistles) and does not treat doctrine as mere Lutheran tradition. If one must choose between the two, the fact that the notes in the CSSC are more helpful in the OT, and generally more reliable in both the OT and NT, make it the better choice.

The NIV text used in both study Bibles is the new, revised edition. A later review in the *Quarterly* will evaluate this.