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OBJECTIONS TO THE NIV IN OUR WELS CONGREGATIONS

for: Prof. Fredrich
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I first became interested in the topic of this paper because my wife's grandfather was stubbornly opposed to the use of the NIV in his home congregation. His opposition to the NIV generated a feeling in me that maybe we need to look a little closer at why people are opposed to its use. Norman Held (my wife's grandfather) was the only person I knew personally who didn't support the NIV's usage, so I needed to find other people who were opposed to the NIV to use as sources for this paper. I began by simply asking my classmates. Almost everyone of them I talked to had a name of a person who they knew was against using the NIV. I also made a few personal visits to people I could arrange to meet with geographically. Finally, I spoke with Professor Jeske, who has conducted some 100-150 speaking engagements on the use of the NIV as a Bible for today and he had many interesting comments and notes to add.

What I found was that a book could be written on the subject. There have been various conflicts involving the usage of the NIV and many actions taken. Because of the wide spectrum of findings, I would like to categorize my findings and then concentrate on the one aspect that I consider the most unusual, the most interesting and in a way the most dangerous opposition to the NIV.

The first category I'd like to discuss is probably the most obvious one...people who have grown up with the KJV and thus prefer it to the NIV. The majority of responses I received fell into this category. Most of the people in this group liked the English in the KJV. To them, it seemed more pious. Also, they had memorized their favorite passages in the language of the KJV and thus it held a special place in their heart.

We certainly need to listen to the voice of these people. Most of them are strong, life-long, and faithful members of our congregations. Their preference to the KJV is sincere. They are not out to make waves in their churches. They only want the Bible they grew up with. An interesting note

here is that a majority of the responses I received in this group, the people gave the indication that they would continue to use the KJV for their personal use; but they could also understand why their pastor, teachers and congregation would want to "switch" to the NIV. They could honestly see an advantage in teaching youngsters and communicating God's Word more effectively because of the modern language of the NIV.

The loudest voice of opposition in this first group came from a California couple, Mr. and Mrs. W.T. Rupprecht. They have spent many hours in voicing ^{their opinion against} the use of the NIV not only in their home congregation, but also in synodical publications. They were especially displeased when the "MEDITATIONS" began using the NIV. They wrote a letter expressing their displeasure. They even threatened to cancel their subscription if the situation wasn't corrected. Dale Schwertfeger of Phoenix, Arizona also didn't like the NIV invading his MEDITATIONS and home congregation, but to him the answer was simple...he would use the KJV at home and try not to rock the boat on a congregational level.

The second category as to why people are against the NIV can be dealt with quickly and easily. In this category, the main argument is, "look at the Missouri Synod, they started using a modern translation and it led to all sorts of doctrinal problems." Once again, people are sincere in raising this argument and their intention is that the Wisconsin Synod remain faithful to the pure doctrines of the Bible. However, anyone who would make a statement like the above is a very poor history student. History shows us that the Missouri Synod had its doctrinal problems before it started using a modern translation of the Bible.

There is a third category which I would like to touch on when looking at opposition to the NIV. Dr Henry Koch is a chief spokesman in this group and his views can be found in the December 7, 1981 issue of "Christian News". His basic argument appears to be that he would avoid the NIV because it's

unionistic and that a "Lutheran" translation would be preferable. His own words from "Christian News" are,

" In its Preface to the whole Bible, the NIV mentions the many denominations from whom the translators were chosen. "The New York International Bible Society undertook the financial sponsorship of the project, a sponsorship that made it possible to enlist the help of many distinguished scholars. The fact that participants from the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Australia and New Zealand worked together gave the project its international scope. That they were from many denominations--including Anglican, Assemblies of God, Baptist, Brethren, Christian Reformed, Church of Christ, Evangelical Free, Lutheran, Mennonite, Methodist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, Wesleyan and other churches-- helped to safeguard the translation from sectarian bias."

We ask: Is the avoidance of a sectarian bias by a wide range of scholars chosen from many denominations a safe guarantee of truly reliable translation of the Bible? In our opinion the very opposite is true. Only scholars from denominations that will let the original text of the Bible stand as the supreme authority and never swerve from it can offer us an assurance of a more or less reliable translation. No human translation is perfect. We surely do not want to belittle good scholarship. A very good knowledge of the Biblical languages as well as a good knowledge of its theology and history and a good knowledge of paleography to be able to distinguish between the manuscripts is very essential, but translation is not only a matter of the mind and intellect, but also of the heart linked with a good mind in a firm belief in the absolute Word of God.

THE REFORMED AND HUMAN REASON

In its Preface the NIV proudly calls attention to its transdenominational background and to its over one hundred translators from these various denominations. In the main they have a Reformed background. In the Reformed Church human reason is elevated over Revelation. It seeks to read into or out of Scriptures, what it approves or disapproves of.

The Lutherans are also mentioned as translators of the NIV. Just how many Lutherans took part in it we are not told. We only know of Prof. Jeske of our own WELS Theol. Seminary at Mequon, Wisconsin. It is a sad fact that most of the Lutheran Synods in our country have departed from the staunch stand of Luther and the Lutheran Confessions.

A translation like that of the NIV brought about by a group of translators from very varied denominations

would always be fraught with great danger of losing the truth by way of compromise."

Prof. Jeske talked with me on the matter of unionism and the NIV. First of all he said we wouldn't want to use the KJV in our churches under many of the arguments which Dr. Koch set forth. Secondly he told me that in working on the translating committee, he was free to offer his ideas and that they were always considered. He even mentioned that he felt the NIV was not a masterpiece of Reformed theology. In fact, he pointed to Genesis 7 in both the KJV and the NIV. The KJV has, "He hardened Pharaoh's heart." The "HE" in this verse can to no one except God and taken the way the KJV translates would lead to a Calvinistic idea of double predestination. Prof. Jeske said he did a word study on these verses. The Hebrew showed that it wasn't God hardening Pharaoh's heart, but that Pharaoh was hardening his own heart. Thus, the NIV gets rid of the reformed idea and says, "Pharaoh hardened his own heart."

Prof. Jeske also felt that it is an advantage to have a Bible that is interdenominational. He said that when we are doing evangelism work, people won't be confused by us using a "Lutheran Bible", while the Catholics use the Jerusalem Bible and the Jehovah Witnesses use their New World Translations.

The fourth category of people who are opposed to the NIV appear to me to be the most dangerous group...dangerous in the sense that they may leave the Wisconsin Synod if their home churches use the NIV. I also feel they are dangerous because they base many of their facts on faulty information. This group involves itself with textual criticism and the NIV.

Their criticism of the NIV is that its translation of the New Testament is based upon an eclectic text rather than from the Byzantine family of manuscripts from which the King James Version of the Bible was translated. Because in some instances the use of these other manuscripts resulted in some additions and in many deletions of words and even passages from the translation, the

charge has been raised that the NIV is Satanic and deprives our people of the Word of God.

The Textus Recptus is an edition of the Greek New Testament based largely on the work of Erasmus. The term Textus Receptus is the result of an advertisement for the publication of a Greek Testament which read, "Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus." (The text that you have is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or perverted.) It would, however, appear that the expression Textus Receptus has been thought of to mean, "The text received from God."

A small number of very vocal critics of the NIV argue in books and pamphlets that the text of Erasmus and the King James Version better preserves the original than any other text or translation. A tract by E.L. Bynum states, "We are convinced that the number one reason why the NIV is such a poor translation is because they use the wrong Greek text."

With the discovery and study of the manuscripts of Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, other ancient manuscripts, the papyri and translations it was discovered that there were text-types other than the Byzantine, from which the Erasmus text was taken. The British scholars B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort developed a theory of genealogical groupings that is still widely held today. Westcott and Hort are despised by TR people because they considered the Byzantine the least reliable and were biased in favor of Aleph and B.

The defenders of the Textus Receptus argue that the Byzantine manuscripts vastly outnumber those of all other text-types. They point to the many omissions in the other texts and say that these were prompted by such heresies as Arianism. Their contention is that the beloved manuscripts of Westcott and Hort, Vaticanus and Sinaiticus, developed in the fourth century under heretical conditions and careless scholarship. It is also contended that the Holy Ghost guided the Greek church to reflect errors in the text so that the Byzantine

texts are most faithful. In reality Aleph and B have roots that go back beyond the fourth century and it is fanciful to say the Holy Spirit guided the Greek church any more than he guided the Latin Church which had a version following Western readings.

Which manuscripts are the best, Aleph and B, or the Byzantine text? In our textual criticism class Prof. Kuske told us, "IF some wish to follow the Textus Receptus or the Byzantine extensively we wish them well because it is a good text and will not mislead them in any way. But they ought not condemn us when we use all the witnesses God has preserved for us to study and to translate the New Testament text. Nor should they forget that we disavow the presupposed positions and conclusions of the enemies of God's Word and thus we also use the facts of textual criticism against all who would cast doubt upon the integrity of the New Testament text."

Since the NIV is based on a text not strictly TR, but leans on other texts it has been condemned. Paul Seeger, a layman who has produced a rather lengthy pamphlet against the NIV, equates our pastors with the "Evolutionary geologists" because they defend textual criticism and have allowed the NIV to come into use in our circles. I quote him, "How uncertain our young pastors must be today, coming out of our seminaries having been schooled on the shifting changes of the Nestle-Aland Greek text. Not so the men who instructed me. That Greek and Hebrew text underlying Luther's German and the King James was an absolute...ready to be defended with their lives, so strong was their convictions".

Reading the more radical critics of the NIV one will read something like, "Two thousand key references show how all modern Bibles differ from the King James, and the Greek Textus Receptus from which it was translated." This is supposed to make us think that these modern translations error in two thousand places. Such a comment presupposes that the TR and the KJV are the final irrefutable form of God's Word. God never said that they were.

A hotbed of this controversy is in Christ Lutheran Church in Eagle River, Wisconsin. Our congregation there has a few men (laymen) who have studied different books and tracts on textual criticism and come to the conclusion that the NIV has been translated from faulty Greek manuscripts. I was able to interview a few people in this congregation on this subject. Among those I interviewed were my wife's grandfather, the pastor (Eugene Ahlswede) and one other layman, Mr. Orville Liermann. Their story and the controversy concerning textual criticism and the NIV in their church is an interesting one.

Pastor Ahlswede said the whole matter started out so innocently and then exploded into a very dangerous situation. It all began in Christ's Lutheran Christian day school with the books our synod publishes. The books began to use NIV references instead of the KJV. Pastor asked the church council if they would mind if he began to introduce the NIV to the rest of the congregation during the readings on Sunday morning. A group of men volunteered to study the situation a bit and report back to the council and voters assembly. It was at the voters assembly that the opposition (totally unexpected) voiced their opinion to using the NIV.

The group was against the NIV because they felt the NIV robbed Jesus of his deity and this happened because the NIV was translated mainly from Westcott and Hort manuscripts. Pastor Ahlswede said he was totally unaware that anyone in his congregation even knew what textual criticism really was. What he discovered was that there were a few men who had spent a great deal of time looking into the matter. Pastor said he felt somewhat lost in the initial discussion because it had been 20 years since he had his seminary course in textual criticism and he hadn't kept up on it to any great degree. His first suggestion was that the church invite Prof. Kuske up to

to discuss textual criticism with the congregation. The response he got from his small group of opposition was, "Oh, that won't do any good because all the Seminary professors are biased." It was then that he knew he had a real problem on his hands.

One of the problems was my wife's grandfather, Norman Held. He is a very stubborn, ultra-conservative, both politically and religiously. Most of his information was gathered from the Bynum tract which he swallowed hook, line and sinker. In talking with him he insisted that the NIV is another communistic plot to overthrow America. Just as a side note...while I was at Held's house, he also informed me of three or four other communist plots going on in our country right now. To him, Russia is winning the "Cold War" hands down. Once again, Norman Held is vocal, stubborn and probably a little bit senile, but he is still a very faithful member of our Eagle River congregation. It's the faithful members that are many times the most difficult to deal with and I think Pastor Ahlswede found this to be the case with Norman Held. In fact both Pastor Ahlswede and Norman Held ended up quite sick toward the end of last summer and Pastor told me he thought a lot of it had to do with the NIV situation in his church.

Another strong voice of opposition against the NIV in Eagle River is Mr. Orville Liermann. I spent the better part of one afternoon discussing the situation with him. I was surprised with the knowledge and literature this man possessed on the subject of textual criticism.

He told me he first began to study the matter over 20 years ago when his wife's relation became Jehovah Witnesses. Mr. Liermann read the NWT and to him it seems it has many similarities with the NIV because they were both translated from more recently discovered manuscripts. Mr. Seeger, mentioned earlier, made a similar claim in his pamphlet. Seeger would like to leave us with the

impression that the NIV is united with the NWT in an effort to distort God's truth. In comparing these two translations on key passages it is obvious that the NWT is dishonest, but this cannot be said of the NIV.

Mr. Liermann also gave me a list of his major objections to the NIV. He wanted me to know that he has no objections to the NIV in regard to changing the language to a more modern expression, but he was against it because of the following. First of all, the first seven books of the New Testament have over 300 footnotes. These footnotes insinuate suspicion and distrust as to the authenticity of the Word of God. Examples of these footnotes are in Mark 16:9-20 and John 7:53-8:11. Here the footnotes read, "the two most reliable and early manuscripts do not have these verses." Liermann said the NWT left out the footnotes in later editions and the same thing will probably happen to the NIV.

Liermann is against the NIV because of the use of the Aleph and B manuscripts. When I asked him if he had ever done any work with the Greek language to be able to distinguish the differences between the manuscripts, he answered "no", but he also added, "The Greek ~~our~~ pastors have agree with the Westcott and Hort manuscripts so they are no better off than I am." Liermann is dead set against any use of the Aleph and B manuscripts because of the theology of Westcott and Hort. Westcott and Hort believed in evolution and that Jesus was possibly created and so Liermann says we shouldn't use the manuscripts these men advocate. He also says of these two manuscripts, "God wouldn't allow his word to lay waste in the Vatican library ~~i~~ like the B manuscript was or in a trash heap at Mt Sinai like the Aleph manuscript was."

Liermann's main contention is that the NIV robs Jesus of his deity by the way it translates. The following 5 pages were given to me personally by Mr. Liermann. They contain passages which Liermann feel rob Jesus of his deity and an explanation of why he feels as he does. They are pretty much self explanatory.

Subject: Can We Trust the New International Version?

The N.I.V. belittles our Lord and Saviour and trys to remove his deity by its wording, this is not acceptable regardless of its other virtues.

Compare verses listed between the KJV and the NIV:

KJV Luke 23:42 "Lord remember me when Thou comest into thy kingdom"

NIV Luke 23:42 "Jesus remember me when you come into your kingdom"

The name Lord shows his deity, the NIV chooses to use the name Jesus which was a very common name in those days.

KJV Romans 14:10 "fôr we shall all stand before the judgement seat of Chirst"

NIV Romans 14:10 "fôr we will all stand before God's judgement seat"

NIV takes the judgement away from Christ in this verse 137-B-137 W+H

KJV I Timothy 3:16 "God was manifest in the flesh"

NIV I Timothy 3:16 "He appeared in a body" 137 Alaph W+H

Note: It can truthfully be said that any sinfull human being appears in a body, the NIV here doesnt honor Christ by this translation.

John Burgon, one of the greatest scholars of the Greek manuscripts that ever lived, checked hundreds of manuscripts and found that over 97 manuscripts out of every hundred read the same as the KJV, "God was manifest in the flesh."

KJV John 6:69 "And we believe and are sure that Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"

NIV John 6:69 "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God" 135 W+H

St. John says in verse 20:31 that he wrote the book of John so that "ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God" in the light of this verse he surely woulnd't put the words, " the Holy One of God" into Peter's mouth. In Matt. 16:16, Peter refers to Jesus as "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God", it is

not reasonable that Peter would use the NIV term, Thou art the Holy one of God, on another occasion.

The NIV translation is a real blow to the deity of Christ, since the created angels are called HOLY in Matt. 25:31. According to the Greek scholar HOSKIER the KJV in this verse is "almost supernaturally accurate."

KJV Luke 2:33 "And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things spoken of him" NOTE; KJV indicates that Joseph is not Christ's father.

NIV Luke 2:33 "The child's father and mother marvelled"
NOTE: If the NIV translation is correct that Jesus has a human father then we have no savior.

KJV Luke 2:43 "And Joseph and his mother knew not of it"
Here again the KJV is correct

NIV Luke 2:43 "while his parents were returning home" Here again the NIV says that Jesus had a human father and mother.

KJV Luke 2:48 "thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing"

KJV Luke 2:49 In this verse Jesus rebukes Mary's statement in verse 48, and makes it plain to her that Joseph is not his father by his answer "wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business"
The NIV in Luke 2:33,43 completely robs Jesus of his deity and states in plain English that Jesus was conceived of a human father and mother
THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.

KJV Mark 15:28 "And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, and he was numbered with the transgressors"

This verse refers to Isaiah 53:12 and proves that Jesus was indeed the promised Savior.

NIV This verse is omitted completely, this robs Jesus of the fact that he fulfilled Isaiah 53:12.

KJV Matt. 18:11 "For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost"

NIV This verse is omitted completely

The NIV omits 16 verses altogether

KJV Matt. 24:36 "But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only."

NIV Matt. 24:36 "Not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father."

Jesus in the KJV refers to his father as "my Father" which is correct because the Father is His Father.

KJV Matt. 27:54 "The centurion said "Truly this was the Son of God"

NIV Matt. 27:54 Footnote states that the centurion could also have said "surely he was a son" The NIV even goes so far as to spell son in small letters. This doesn't say much for the deity of Jesus.

KJV John 4:42 "And know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

NIV John 4:42 "we know that this man really is the savior of the world"

Here the NIV has reduced Jesus to a mere man. This equates Jesus to men throughout history who have claimed to be the Saviour of the world.

KJV John 6:47 "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life."

NIV John 6:47 "I tell you the Truth, he who believes has everlasting life."

NIV takes Jesus out of the picture, doesn't say you have to believe in Jesus to have eternal life.

KJV John 1:14,18 - 3:16,18 "only begotten Son"

NIV John 1:14 "One and only Son" John 1:18 "God the only Son"

John 3:16 "One and only Son" John 3:18 "God's one and only son"

The NIV is incorrect here, because the NIV reduces Jesus to the status of all human believers who are the Sons of God, check I John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the Sons of God."

KJV I John 4:3 "And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God"

NIV I John 4:3 "But every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God"

NIV does not acknowledge that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh in this verse.

KJV Hebrews 1:3 "When he had by himself purged our sins"

NIV Hebrews 1:3 "After he had provided purification for sins"

NIV eliminates "by himself" and "Our sins" -- This certainly weakens the text.

KJV Book of John "Jesus says Verily, verily, 25 times.

NIV Book of John Everytime its translated "I tell you the truth"

KJV Matt 6:13 "For thine is the kingdom and the power, and the glory for ever, amen"

NIV Matt 6:13 Eliminates this and puts it in the footnotes.

According to the Greek Scholar Legg of Oxford University, in a book of his, "Research of Thousands, Greek New Testament Manuscripts, 1940 Edition. His findings are that the King James ending to the Lord's prayer is found in all the manuscripts except ten. In spite of this overwhelming evidence, modern professors of Greek choose to listen to the advice of Westcott & Hort and leave this ending to the Lord's prayer out of the NIV.

KJV Eph. 3:9 "Which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ."

NIV Eph. 3:9 "which for ages past was kept kidden in God, who Created all things"

The KJV in Col. 1:16,17 has this to say of Jesus, "For by him were all things created that are in heaven, and that are in earth visible and invisible, whether they be throngs or dominions, or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist."

The NIV completely robs Jesus of the honor, glory and the awesome power to create heaven and earth, if this isn't robbing Jesus of his deity nothing is.

I Kings 18:21 Elijah on Mount Carmel said to the people and 450 prophets of BAAL, "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal then follow him. And the people answered him not a word."

Christians today are faced with much the same choice, they can either bow down and worship the belittled and the stripped of much his deity Jesus of the modern speech bibles, including the NIV

OR

Choose to worship the glorious all powerful Saviour of the KJV, which is it going to be?

END OF STUDY BY ORVILLE LIERMANN

A concluding remark which AOrville Liermann had was; "Out of the 5255 New testament manuscripts that are known to exist today, 90% of them are in essential agreement with the KJV, on the other hand the NIV is translate from a small number of manuscripts out of the remaining 10%, these manuscripts are inconsistant and don't even agree among themselves."

I personally don't agree with the claim that the NIV robs Jesus of his deity. In fact, Pastor Ahlswede wrote a letter to Earl S. Kalland, the executive Committee Chairman of the NIV, asking him if there was any truth to the charge that the NIV robs Jesus of his deity. Kalland's response was, "Contrary to the assertion that the deity of Christ is undercut in the NIV, look at John 1:18. Does KJV in John 1:18 call Jesus God? No! The NIV does: "God the only Son." This is a result of textual criticism since KJV times. Look also at Romans 9:5."

I think another problem the NIV may be having in our churches is the swiftness with which it has made its inroads. When I began the Seminary four years ago, perhaps one or two of my classmates brought the NIV to class, while the rest of us still lugged our KJV around. During my middler year, there was already about 60% of my class using the NIV. Now during my senior year, everyone that I know brings the NIV to class. I think by using the Bible everyday as we do at the Sem, we can adjust more quickly to a new translation, but for many people in our congregations, I think they may need a more gradual change. I do think there are very definite reasons for using the NIV. Our job is to communicate the Gospel in the clearest way we can. Since the NIV speaks to our people in their own language, it is a tool that can definately help us.

Its impossible to say everything on the subject of opposition to the NIV, it is a complex matter. I'm sure we've not heard the last of the debate over the NIV. If any of the inflammatory literature that I have seen is distributed

widely among our people, we as pastors are going to have to speak up on the matter. I sincerely hope we can speak with knowledge and that we can take peoples' fears into consideration so that no one will have unloving feelings over which translation of the Bible we use in our churches.