

A LUTHERAN TRANSLATION: THE TIME IS NOW

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## Abstract

In recent years, a lot has happened in the Bible translation world. The New International Version pulled their beloved 1984 edition off the shelves, in order to promote their updated 2011 edition. This could have been a wonderful thing if the new version had been more similar to their old version, and less similar to their 2003 offering Today's New International Version TNIV, which many thought, was leaning too far towards a "gender-inclusive" translation of the text. Because of this big change, many denominations of Christianity began to seek other translation options for their worship and publications. The Wisconsin Evangelical Lutherans Synod (WELS) was not immune to this problem. In the years after 2011, much research and study were done to figure out what translation might best serve the needs of Wisconsin Synod Lutherans, but ultimately, the final answer was, "use whatever translation you like." While this was a beneficial endeavor for Christians to dig into many translations, and see more of the nuances of the text, it left some people wanting more. Thus, a new idea was born; perhaps Lutherans should have a translation of their own. It was even more than that though; perhaps Lutherans should take it upon themselves to do a faithful translation available to everyone. This new idea led to the birth of the Wartburg Project; a group of pastors and professors of the WELS and the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) dedicated to producing a faithful translation for the people. This idea was met with a healthy dose of skepticism, but perhaps, it is just that skepticism that will allow this project to be completed in the best way possible. With the project now almost half complete, this could indeed be the time for Lutherans to once again offer a faithful translation of the Holy Scriptures, just as Luther did in his day. The intent of this thesis will be to demonstrate the positive aspects of a Lutheran translation through a look at history, interviews with prominent men on both sides of the translation issue, as well as taking encouragement from the Word, to realize that, a Lutheran translation can only serve to benefit God's church here on earth.

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## Introduction

“But that is just your interpretation.” The subjective, all-encompassing, final, and unfortunate retort of those who seek to disenfranchise the Bible of its original, God-given power, in order to exploit a loophole in translation, that will allow them to make the Scriptures fit whatever their narrative might be. Whether they are seeking to strip Jesus of his position as the Messiah, or justify their pro-homosexual or feminist worldview, the culture of Americans in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has taken a hard turn away from any objective truth, much less the Bible, and found themselves in a country where no two subjective realities are ever truly in sync. No longer do people speak of things as black and white, right or wrong, or even male and female, but as in the time of the Judges, “every man does as he sees fit.” (Judges 21:25)

One of the greatest examples of the shifting paradigm of this great nation is the time table of events that lead to same-sex marriage being legalized nationwide. It was only a short twenty years ago that President Bill Clinton signed into law the Defense of Marriage Act, protecting the sanctity of marriage between one man and one woman—but now in 2016, to speak in such a way is deemed unconstitutional.<sup>1</sup> Commercials sporting same-sex couples are common place, and institutions that dare try to take a stand on the Bible are protested against.<sup>2</sup> Transgender celebrities are acclaimed as brave and forward thinking. Even the 1976 Olympic decathlon gold medalist, “World’s Greatest Athlete” has traded in his cleats for high heels.

Gone are the days when every household had the family Bible prominently displayed on the living room coffee table. Gone the days of 55% church attendance by the laity on a Sunday morning.<sup>3</sup> The acronym “KJV” (King James Version) holds almost no meaning, and its successor “NIV” has received some recent bad press as well.

All this is not meant to scare those who hold on to the Bible for what it is; the holy, inspired, inerrant Word of God. All this is meant merely to point out that this world is changing, just as the Lord told his people it would.

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<sup>1</sup> "Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts - CNN.com." Same-Sex Marriage Fast Facts - CNN.com (www.cnn.com). 27 July 2016. Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Wong, Curtis M. "Tylenol's #HowWeFamily Campaign Uses LGBT Couples To Portray Changing Face Of The Family." The Huffington Post., 2 Feb. 2016. Web. 18 Nov. 2016.

<sup>3</sup> "Frequently Requested Church Statistics." *Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate*. Georgetown University, Web. 19 Nov. 2016.

So, what is the duty of faithful Christians in this world today? How can Christians hope to hold God’s Word to the standard that he demands in Revelation 22, “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.” (Revelation 22:19,20 NIV 1984) Certainly, some linguistic decisions need to be made when translating Hebrew or Greek idioms into a destination language that does not have the same understanding of those idioms. Perhaps it is even more necessary to parse out those instances when a gender-neutral pronoun really is the preferred reading when a masculine pronoun is used in the source language. But finally, the end goal remains the same; communicate to the reader as closely as possible, what the native Greek or Hebrew reader would have understood in the text. Professor Jeske laid out the criteria well in his paper prepared for the 1977 synod convention entitled, “Preparing a New Bible Translation Today”,

“Professor Jeske discussed three main points: 1. Determining the wording of the original text, 2. Determining the meaning of the original text, 3. Finding the right English words to convey the meaning of the original. Under the last point Professor Jeske wrote that to be a good English translation a version must adhere to the four following points. It must be faithful to the original text. It should be beautiful. It should be idiomatic. It must be clear.”<sup>4</sup>

That is a tall order that in many ways involves a high degree of subjectivity. Can human beings always make the right decisions on such translation matters? Obviously not. The question then remains, at what point has a given translation taken too many stylistic liberties to be deemed “faithful” or at what point should a person just attribute stylistic differences to human imperfection?

A definitive answer to that question may never be attainable, nor will it be the goal of this paper to definitively answer that question. Rather, this paper will seek to address deeper, more positive implications of publishing a “Lutheran” translation. This paper will seek to demonstrate the positive effects of a Lutheran translation through an examination of history, an examination of current translations, interviews of knowledgeable opponents and proponents to a new

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<sup>4</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990. A New Translation for the WELS, *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, (accessed September 5,2016) p 15

translation, and most importantly God's Word, in order to demonstrate the benefit a new translation may have for those seeking God's Word preserved in its Truth and purity.

### **Literature Review**

Finding sources for a paper about Bible translation choices in a specific denomination of Christianity is a limited exercise. This is especially true when the topic of discussion happened within a relatively recent timeframe. For that reason, many of the resources for this paper came from papers presented at various conventions and seminars or published in quarterly publications. The positive of addressing such a timely topic is the ability to interview those men most directly related to the happenings.

It is particularly interesting to note that the topics of discussion change slightly surrounding translation choices and reasons for making the change, but the same central focus and truth remains at the center of it all. Faithful men throughout the ages, seeking to preserve God's Word in the best way that they know how, so that more and more people may come to a knowledge of the Truth.

It was a very great privilege for this author to have had the opportunity to interview some of these very men over e-mail in order to better understand some of the reasoning behind both sides of the arguments for and against a Lutheran bible. They demonstrated a love and concern for God's Word as well as a love and concern for his people in the way that they answered questions, even those questions concerning the positions contrary to their own. There is a great amount of thanks due to Professors John Brug, Kenneth Cherney and Thomas Nass, as well as Pastor Brian Keller, for taking the time to help explain why they believe this endeavor is, or is not necessary. Quite frankly, this paper could not have happened without them, and it was encouraging for this author to see how very knowledgeable and faithful men can disagree, and yet, in the end, remain united in their faith and mission.

## What kind of problem?

In order to understand the selecting of a translation, it is important to understand the kinds of issues that are currently affecting translations today. It is also important to note, that while there are many translational differences, very few if any, affect the Bible's central message; Jesus Christ crucified to save sinners. No translation can ever be perfect, but there is no question that some are better than others. Perhaps it is best to demonstrate this concept by comparing a few translations to determine what message they may be portraying to the reader. An easy example to refer to is found in Romans 16:1-2.

Option 1: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant** of the church in Cenchrea. I ask you **to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints** and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me.<sup>5</sup>

Option 2: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **deacon** of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you **to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people** and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor of many people, including me.<sup>6</sup>

Option 3: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, who is a **deacon** in the church in Cenchrea. **Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God's people.** Help her in whatever she needs, for she has been helpful to many, and especially to me.<sup>7</sup>

Option 4: I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a **servant** of the church at Cenchreae, that you may **welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints**, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.<sup>8</sup>

Focusing in on the words in bold, it is quickly apparent that there are two schools of thought here. First of all, what is the best translation for the Greek word, “διάκονον.” According to Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich's Greek lexicon, the most basic definition of διάκονον is “one who is busy with something. in a manner that is of assistance to someone”.<sup>9</sup> The most

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<sup>5</sup> *The Holy Bible: New International Version—Anglicised.* (1984). (electronic edition., Ro 16:1–2). London: Hodder & Stoughton.

<sup>6</sup> *The New International Version.* (2011). (Ro 16:1–2). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

<sup>7</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Ro 16:1–2). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>8</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2016). (Ro 16:1–2). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>9</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., & Bauer, W. (2000). *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature* (3rd ed., p. 230). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

common definition in most biblical translations today being “servant.” Since the second half of verse 2 says that she was helpful to many, and helpful to Paul, one may rightly come to the conclusion that Paul is talking about a very faithful woman, who demonstrated her love for her Lord, by being a servant of others. What would be the intention behind a translation committee choosing to use the Word “deacon” in this particular verse, when “servant” seems to fit the context?<sup>10</sup>

This word choice may appear to be innocent enough at first glance, but really it sends a conflicting message about the roles of men and women in the church when there need not be any conflict here. 1 Timothy 3: 8-12 lists the qualifications for a διάκονος or “deacon” in the church. Very specifically in verse 12, Paul wrote, “διάκονοι ἔστωσαν μιᾷς γυναικὸς ἄνδρες.”<sup>11</sup> “Deacons must be a husband of one wife.” Besides the fact that every use of that Greek word, “deacon” is always masculine throughout this section of 1 Timothy, this is a decisive verse. It definitively says, only men were to be deacons or hold positions of authority in the church. With this reference in mind, it is clear to see what direction those translations that choose to call Phoebe a “deacon” are pushing towards. One defense of this translation is from the Committee of the New International Version 2011 who defended their changing of the verse like this,

Complementarian and egalitarian scholars alike are increasingly agreeing that *diakonos* here means “deacon” (not just “servant,” though “servant” is provided as an alternative in the footnote; see also the New Living Translation [NLT] and the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) and that *prostatis* means a patron or benefactor (as in the English Standard Version [ESV] and the Holman Christian Standard Bible [HCSB]), not just someone who was a “great help” in some unspecified way.

This is not meant to single out, or attack any one translation, but rather to demonstrate what the problem is. This major Bible translation has in its foreword, “The committee mirrors the original group of translators in its diverse international and denominational makeup and in its unifying commitment to the Bible as God’s inspired Word”<sup>12</sup> and yet their support for changing the translation of the inspired Word is nothing more than, “some complementarian and egalitarian

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<sup>10</sup> Also note that *diakonos* is used three other times in Romans. Two times in Romans 13:4, both times referring to the government as God’s “servant” to carry out justice on the earth. The other instance where it appears is in Romans 15:8, where Christ is called the “servant to the circumcised.”

<sup>11</sup> Aland, K., Black, M., Martini, C. M., Metzger, B. M., Robinson, M. A., & Wikgren, A. (1993; 2006). *The Greek New Testament, Fourth Revised Edition (with Morphology)* (1 Ti 3:12). Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft. (All Greek Verses will be from this source).

<sup>12</sup> *The New International Version*. (2011). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.



scholars agree it should mean deacon.” That is a careless translation of the Word that plays into the thought of today’s world in a dangerous way. They allow, and even push for, people to interpret this passage as proof that woman can hold positions of authority in the church.<sup>13</sup> Likewise, the New Living Translation states in their foreword, “The translators of the New Living Translation set out to render the message of the original texts of Scripture into clear, contemporary English.”<sup>14</sup> If the goal of the translation was to put it into clear English, why chose a word that is derived from the Greek, and makes a doctrinal statement, when calling her a “servant” would convey her duties in the church just as clearly?

The second phrase in question is how these people were to welcome her into their midst. Three of the translations are very similar in their rendering. They all emphasize that the people are to welcome her in a manner worthy of the saints of God, but option number three takes on a different approach. It says, “Welcome her in the Lord as one who is worthy of honor among God’s people.” This translation is not only not true to the original text, but it seems to further emphasize her role as someone who brings with her a certain degree of authority. As if she, herself, is someone worthy of great honor. In and of itself, this is not a bad thought, though it is not textually accurate, but paired with the first decision to use the word “deacon” this seems to be emphasizing an incorrect message. Again, this leaves the door open to interpretations of the text that go beyond what the Bible has said about the roles of men and women. There are plenty of other places in the Bible for people to “read-in” their own ideas without English translations causing unnecessary difficulties. This is one of many “translation decisions” that the NIV 2011 committee deemed beneficial, and better than their original translation.<sup>15</sup> As Professor Brug put it, “Our duty is to provide all of those who are reading and listening to the Bible with the clearest and most complete testimony to the truth that we can. Another way of putting the question is: what percentage of food has to be poison before the food is poison?”<sup>16</sup> Is the new NIV

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<sup>13</sup> Grady, J. Lee. "Why I Defend Women Preachers." *Charisma Magazine.*, 20 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Nov. 2016., Mowczko, Marg. "The First Century Church & the Ministry of Women." *New Life.*, 2016. Web. 25 Nov. 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2013). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation.* Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

<sup>15</sup> See appendix A: The Committee on Bible Translation. *Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation.* N.p.: Biblegateway.com, Aug. 2010. PDF.

<sup>16</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

translation really the “clearest” and most “complete” way of emphasizing the scriptural truth of God’s intentions for the roles of men and women?

Options two and three were the two passages that had a potential for issue, which are New International Version 2011 and New Living Translation respectively. Options 1 and 4, however, handled the text very well! There are indeed translations available that do a very fair and fine job of handling the text. Option 1 was NIV 1984 and option 4 was the English Standard Version, both of which have been used frequently for church and personal use, and for good reason. There is no need to start getting rid of Bibles that handle the text well, but perhaps, there is good reason to add to the pool of good Biblical resources.

### **History of “Lutheran” Translation**

All of these changes in recent years are just one of the reasons the “Wartburg Project” began. The “Wartburg Project” is a committee of WELS (Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod) and ELS (Evangelical Lutheran Synod) pastors and lay members who are working together “to produce a *balanced* translation, suitable for all-purpose use in the church.”<sup>17</sup> In an interview with the editor of Old Testament translation, Professor Emeritus John Brug, I was able to ask him about the need for a new translation in our current culture, to which he responded,

In considering the degree of need, we need to be looking at least twenty years into the future. It is shocking to see how much the doctrinal position and hermeneutics of Evangelicalism have declined in the last thirty years. If we cannot continue to rely on this segment of Christianity to produce good commentaries and study Bibles, can we rely on it to continue to produce Bible translations that share our hermeneutical principles?<sup>18</sup>

This idea is not without historical background either. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century many German Lutherans were still using Luther’s German Bible while making the transition into an English Bible. The most prevalent English Bible at that time being the King James Version. Some of those early German pastors already had their reservations about making the switch to the King James. In an interview with Pastor Brian Keller, the editor of the New Testament for

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<sup>17</sup> "FAQs #27." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>18</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

the Wartburg Project, he cited references as far back as 1919, of pastors holding on to the “Lutheran” Bible,

Professor August Pieper plainly preferred Luther’s translation to the KJV [See “Our Transition Into English,” translated by John Jeske in *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* Vol. 100, #2, pp. 85-106. Pieper’s article was written in German and appeared in the year 1919 in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, Vol. 16.]. Many other Lutherans preferred Luther’s translation as well. There are many quotations of Luther’s Bible scattered over the years in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* and the journals of the LCMS and ELS.<sup>19</sup>

Regardless of the initial hesitation to use the King James Version, and the potential idea of translating Luther’s Bible into English, the King James version became the most widely used bible translation of almost all English-speaking churches in the mid-1920s.<sup>20</sup> This was not the end of all discussions on translation within Lutheran circles. In fact, the topic came up quite frequently.

Already in 1948, the English of the King James Version was becoming increasingly outdated.<sup>21</sup> Lutherans all across America were looking for a good Bible translation among the many English versions that were then being produced. It was in the *Concordia Theological Monthly* that the, then professor at Saint Louis Theological Seminary J.T. Mueller, offered one solution to this problem, “Use a standard version as the main text and the others as aids to clarity of understanding and variety of expression.”<sup>22</sup> But what might that standard be? If a person is to look at many translations to compare them, it seems beneficial that they have one solid one, with which to compare the other options? Professor Mueller’s answer to this question was a unified translation for Lutherans, “Would it, then, not make for unity, rather than disunity, to have a reliable Lutheran Bible translation? Meanwhile, considering the confusion caused by the various versions now on the market, the writer is convinced that it is a matter of wisdom for us in our public ministry to adhere to the King James Version until that new and better Lutheran translation has been produced.”<sup>23</sup> This matter continued to appear frequently for nearly the next

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<sup>19</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016.

<sup>20</sup> Pastor Brian Keller, E-mail Interview. 14 November 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Mueller, John T. "Can We Trust Modern Versions?." *Concordia Theological Monthly* 19.4 (1948): 297-300. *Media Resources*. Web. 29 Nov. 2016.

<sup>22</sup> Mueller, John T. p. 297

<sup>23</sup> Mueller, John T. p. 300

seventy years. It was raised once again at the 1953 Wisconsin Synod Convention in Watertown, WI, where the idea was suggested that a committee be designated to translate a part of the New Testament as a trial version,

Since the appearance of the *Revised Standard Version* has incited anew the study of Bible translations, also among us, and made us conscious anew of weaknesses in the *Authorized Version*, which has been in general use in our Synod; and since suggestions have again been made that we proceed with a revision of the *Authorized Version*: the Synodical Committee at its May meeting adopted the following resolution:

We suggest that the assignment of the Committee on the *Revised Standard Version* be extended to include a study of some book of the New Testament (e.g., Galatians), that the Committee be encouraged to solicit the cooperation and comment of the members of the Synod, and then to publish the book studied in the *Quartalschrift*, so that thereby the translation may be rather widely tested as to readability and theological correctness.

Your committee concurs in this recommendation, with the understanding that it be in the nature of a revision of the *Authorized Version*.” As implied in the above resolution the committee now contemplates undertaking a trial translation of Galatians in the manner indicated, “that it be in the nature of a revision of the *Authorized Version*,” and herewith invites the members of the Synod to contribute whatever might be of value and help to the committee in carrying out its assignment.<sup>24</sup>

This resolution was then carried out in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* throughout the years 1955-1957, but the trial translation was met mostly with negativity because it seemed to have moved too far away from the beloved wording of the King James Version, which some people had learned to love.<sup>25</sup> Translation issues were not the only major thing going on in the WELS in the 1950s and 1960s. Shortly after this assignment of the committee to begin a trial translation of Galatians, it was announced that the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutherans Synod and the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod (from here on referred to as the LCMS) could no longer be in fellowship with one another. This led to a bit of a drought in the “translation issue” talks that had been going on.<sup>26</sup>

The question was finally raised again in the early 1970s when a committee of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary professors was given the task to begin evaluating the various English translations that were available.<sup>27</sup> These evaluations began appearing in the *Wisconsin Lutheran*

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<sup>24</sup> "FAQs #25." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>25</sup> "FAQs #25." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990. p 6

<sup>27</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990. p 8

*Quarterly* in the year 1971 and along with them, once again, the idea was raised of making a Lutheran translation. Unfortunately, the idea was shot down rather quickly due to limited financial resources and distribution.<sup>28</sup> This committee of professors eventually published a list of seven translation evaluations, stating that, of the translations evaluated the New American Standard Bible (NASB) was the most acceptable.<sup>29</sup> Over the next few years they continued to publish articles about the NASB stating in 1972, “We are still favorably impressed by the NASB, at least more so than with any of the other versions.”<sup>30</sup> Whether they were merely proceeding cautiously or had not concluded their research on the NASB, it does not sound as though they had strong convictions of this Bible being the best an English translation could be. Perhaps that is why in 1974 at a Bible Translation Seminar held on the campus of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary the closing resolution had five points requesting that the faculty study the potential of the new translation at that time, the NIV. But that was not all that was in these five, approved and passed resolutions. Resolution number three stated: “We embark on our own translation and publication of portions of the Bible as a pilot project.”<sup>31</sup>

This pilot project was somewhat left in the dust by the rather quick decision by the faculty to move ahead with the NIV, though at the time the NIV itself contained only the New Testament.<sup>32</sup> In fact, one author wondered whether, perhaps, they may have moved too quickly and disregarded previous warnings to “make haste slowly.”<sup>33</sup> While the NIV was a sort of “official yet unofficial” Bible translation from 1974 on, it received its final endorsement and approval at the synod convention in 1979.<sup>34</sup> Though it was not perfect, this new translation went on to serve many different Christians in many different denominations for nearly forty years, until Zondervan denied users of the translation the right to continue using that text after the release of their new update in 2011.<sup>35</sup> With their backs up against the wall then, a WELS

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<sup>28</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 9

<sup>29</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 9

<sup>30</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 10

<sup>31</sup> "FAQs #25." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 12

<sup>33</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 13

<sup>34</sup> Oehlke, Christopher, 1990 p 16

<sup>35</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

committee was formed to decide whether or not a new translation or revision was a feasible solution.<sup>36</sup> The conclusion of this group, though not unanimous, is found in the *WELS Book of Reports & Memorials*, “In the end, there is disagreement on whether it is feasible to produce a confessional Lutheran translation of the Bible... It would require a large amount of money at a time when funds for mission work and ministerial education are in short supply... In light of all this, perhaps the question should not be, “Can we do it?” but, “Must we do it?”<sup>37</sup> While money certainly was a major concern in the publishing of a new translation, it was not the only concern shared by some of the men on the WELS Translation Feasibility Committee. Many concerns were excellently laid out and addressed in President Mark Schroeder’s letter in May of 2013<sup>38</sup>, in which he stated,

*I support Option 2 presented by the Translation Evaluation Committee for the near term. [An option that stated that the WELS use various translations for various applications instead of just one.]*

Related to my support for Option 2 in the near term, ***I believe that we should initiate a project to produce a new or revised translation*** as a long-term solution.

I hold these positions having the highest respect for those who served on the Translation Evaluation Committee and on the Translation Feasibility Committee (TFC). Their knowledge of translation issues is extensive. Their commitment to the truth of the Scriptures and their desire to serve the best interests of the synod cannot and should not be questioned. Their work was thorough and exhaustive. Their conclusions and recommendations can and should be received with deep respect and with sincere thanks for the faithful service they have performed with much time, effort, and prayer.<sup>39</sup>

For a more extensive look at all of the oppositions to a new translation, President Schroeder’s letter is attached in the appendix, but there are a few arguments that this paper will look into more in depth, and with more current information later on. The point of this history is to show that throughout the history of English translations in America, Lutherans have never really been “satisfied.” Multiple times, by multiple people throughout history, the idea has been expressed that perhaps a Lutheran translation would be the best option. Each time it was mentioned in this brief history, it was almost always stated as “the long-term” solution. It is now almost 100 years

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<sup>36</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>37</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>38</sup> Included in the appendix.

<sup>39</sup> Schroeder, Mark. "Thoughts on the Translation Issue" *Immanuel Lutheran Kewaunee*.. [immanuellutherankewaunee.org](http://immanuellutherankewaunee.org), Web. 3 Dec. 2016

after Pieper first recommended at least translating Luther's Bible into English for use in the church and yet the debate over translation rages on. Take a look at this quote and judge for yourself if it does not accurately describe the current situation that the WELS finds itself in,

Several years ago our Church was memorialized to consider bringing out a modern translation of the Bible by Lutheran scholars. So far the Lutheran Church has not had a translation made by its own members. It has patiently used the translations of the Reformed [and Evangelicals]. Has not the time arrived that we follow in Luther's footsteps and produce our own? ... The objection that we Lutherans should not use a Bible translation different from that of others no longer holds, since the various churches are divided in the use of various translations. Would it, then, not make for unity, rather than disunity, to have a reliable Lutheran Bible translation?<sup>40</sup>

The Lutheran church has not yet made a translation. For years, Lutherans have used NIV, recently some churches have made the switch to ESV. Still, others have suggested using the Holman Christian Standard Bible.<sup>41</sup> Lutherans today remain un-united as far as a Bible translation is concerned, and have done nothing to even attempt to bring back a unity in translation. Meanwhile, there is no unified text among the other denominations either. It is not viewed as a strange or sectarian thing to use a translation different from everyone else because there is no common translation. Perhaps a new translation, done by Lutherans, would serve to unite Lutherans because they certainly are not united in translation now. The most amazing part to this author is that quote was taken from John Mueller's paper from seventy years ago, and as it so often does, history has a way of repeating itself. Starting our own translation now may serve to unify the Lutheran church of the future and protect against further slippage from the translations of the Reformed.

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<sup>40</sup> Mueller, John T. p 300

<sup>41</sup> "Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016. "Professor Cherney, Professor of Hebrew Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." E-mail interview. 21 Nov. 2016.

## The Wartburg Project

In 2013, just such a project was started. The “Wartburg Project” began with a group of men and women, made up of pastors and lay people of the WELS and Evangelical Lutheran Synod (ELS) who are dedicated to producing a Bible translation that clearly communicates the Gospel to today’s people.<sup>42</sup> This group was formed after the Translation Feasibility Committee reported that it was not wise for the WELS to embark on publishing their own translation at that time. This group of Lutheran pastors and professors joined together in order to make the Lutheran translation a possibility. Because the WELS did not have the money to pay their scholars for the work they would do on the translation, the members of the Wartburg Project formed a parasynodical group, in fellowship with the ELS and the WELS, of almost all volunteers. Their focus is not to attack any of the other translations, but only “to produce a Bible that communicates the gospel clearly to today’s people, the Evangelical Heritage Version.”<sup>43</sup> The goal of this group is to have the Bible translated in a much shorter time frame than many of the other translations. This was thought to be impossible by some,<sup>44</sup> but there is a method to the seeming madness. They propose to do this by leaning heavily on the work of good translations before them. They say on their homepage,

The product to be produced by the Wartburg Project could best be called a translation/revision. Although our translation is based on the Hebrew and Greek texts, templates are often being used as a starting point in the translation process. This approach builds on the tradition of English and Lutheran Bible translation. The primary resources, of course, are the original Hebrew and Greek texts. We are standing on the shoulders of giants. We make use of the World English Bible (WEB), which is a public domain descendant of the King James Version (KJV) and the American Standard Version (ASV).<sup>45</sup>

So perhaps it is best to use their own terminology when speaking of this project. This translation/revision is more than just a small church denomination trying to translate the Bible using their Greek New Testament and *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*. It is a full-fledged revision

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<sup>42</sup> "The Wartburg Project." [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). *The Wartburg Project.*, Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>43</sup> "The Wartburg Project." [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). *The Wartburg Project.*, Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>44</sup> "Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016.

<sup>45</sup> The Wartburg Project." [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). *The Wartburg Project.*, Web. 03 Nov. 2016.



and examination of other's work, in order to really convey the meaning of the Greek and the Hebrew. This is not to say it is only a revision, though. Their website states that the first and foremost tool they looked at was the original Greek and Hebrew, then they employed all the different tools at their disposal to help deepen the understanding of the original words.<sup>46</sup> In his interview, Pastor Keller assured me that, "Our process involves waves of treatment, and that means there are waves of resources."<sup>47</sup> While some may argue that the WELS is not big enough, or does not have the scholars to make such a translation happen,<sup>48</sup> standing on the good work of others helps to eliminate some of the potential for weakness. The work on the English Heritage Version (EHV) is not, as Pastor Keller puts it, a reinventing of the wheel. "We did not reinvent the wheel in many cases. Anyone who pictures our process as a lonely pastor sitting in his basement with the BHS and one lexicon really has no clue about how we did our work. We had many, many tools at our disposal and we used them in rapid succession."<sup>49</sup>

If the final product of the Wartburg Project turns out to be what they claim it will be, "a balanced translation, suitable for all-purpose use in the church"<sup>50</sup> that does a better job protecting the text from denominational idiosyncrasies, it is hard to see how this could be a bad thing. Until the final work is done on this project, there are those who do have their concerns. There certainly is a way that this could be done poorly, but after talking to the editors and reading through the papers on their website, it seems they are doing all they can to cater to these concerns.

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<sup>46</sup> The Wartburg Project." [wartburgproject.org](http://wartburgproject.org). *The Wartburg Project*. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>47</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>48</sup> Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016. "Professor Cherney, Professor of Hebrew Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." E-mail interview. 21 Nov. 2016.

<sup>49</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>50</sup> FAQs #27." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

## Addressing Legitimate Concerns

It has already been shown that publishing a Lutheran translation has been an idea for many years, but what has not been mentioned, is that in recent times, it has been met with some opposition. A majority of this opposition is made up of very valid concerns of men trying to do their best to keep God's Word "for everyone."<sup>51</sup> This certainly is a noble and necessary task, and perhaps it is hesitations such as these that allow for a "Lutheran" translation to be done in the best way possible. In fact, the primary concerns of the opposition to the translation may just be the reminder needed, that though a Lutheran translation is done by Lutherans, it is not only for Lutherans. When translating the Bible, it is important to remember, it is for everyone.

The first argument to be addressed is, "A WELS and ELS translation is too sectarian. No one would take it seriously, and WELS members may be tempted to think of it as the only 'WELS way'."<sup>52</sup> This is certainly something to be avoided and can be avoided. This would be as easy as pastors doing what they are already doing; explaining to people that there are many translations, that do different things well or not so well. It has never been the goal of the WELS to have their own official translation. In fact, it is quite the opposite. The 1977 Synod Proceeding of the WELS specifically states, "The Synod never adopted any translation as the official Bible of the Synod."<sup>53</sup> And again, in 1979, "We still concur with the 1977 resolution, 'That this action should not be construed as the adoption of the NIV as the Synod's official Bible.'"<sup>54</sup> This allowed for many different churches to use many different Bibles, but it still gave them a direction to look if they wanted one that was done well. Why would the EHV be any different? Even the writers of the EHV are not looking to be the official WELS Bible,

The Wartburg Project views its work as an attempt to serve the church at large. Our work is an expression of faith and love and service. We are working to provide the church at large (not just WELS) with the best translation we can produce. It has never been our

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<sup>51</sup> "Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016. "Professor Cherney, Professor of Hebrew Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." E-mail interview. 21 Nov. 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016. "Professor Cherney, Professor of Hebrew Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." E-mail interview. 21 Nov. 2016.

<sup>53</sup> FAQs #21."wartburgproject.org/faqs/. The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>54</sup> FAQs #21."wartburgproject.org/faqs/. The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

goal to be ‘the official WELS Bible.’ And we will not seek to be ‘the official WELS Bible.’ We do not encourage anyone to promote or describe our work in those terms.<sup>55</sup>

The name of the game has always been, get the best available biblical resources in front of the people. It has never been about making them choose one.

The objection is still raised, “I don’t see how, when you have a Bible produced by WELS and ELS published by NPH, people are NOT going to see it as “the [official] WELS version.”<sup>56</sup> Was the NIV the “official” WELS version? It has already been stated that this was never the case. Yet, that translation may have been more of an “official” WELS Bible than any other. That is the cause of translation issues in the first place. The WELS had been leaning so heavily on the NIV 1984 translation, that when the rights for publishing were revoked, people were forced to look elsewhere. Good work is always going to be seen for what it really is. Because NIV 1984 was done well, many people wanted to use it. If EHV is done well, while it will remain unofficial, people are going to use it. As far as the publisher, and translators go, test it for yourself. Who published and translated Holman Christian Standard Bible (now Christian Standard Bible), English Standard Version, or New International Version? Did you know them all? Do you not use them because they were translated by men or women, as the case may be, outside of WELS fellowship? How about New King James Version, New Revised Standard Version, or New Century Version, can you name translators and publishers for those? People don’t judge a translation by where it came from, they judge it by the work that is inside. If the EHV offers a version of the Bible that is faithful to the original, not pushing Lutheran doctrine, or adding new books of the Bible, this author believes it will be seen as just another available option of the Scriptures.

A slightly different objection, though it is very similar, is that “a WELS Bible translation would be out of step with other translations because other translations purposely involve people from many denominations.”<sup>57</sup> This is an interesting argument, because of what it implies. Ideally, this means, “the benefit of cross-denominational committees is that no one denomination can get its idiosyncrasies into the translation, and the translation can be an honest representation

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<sup>55</sup> FAQs #21. "wartburgproject.org/faqs/. The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016

<sup>56</sup> "Professor Cheney, Professor of Hebrew Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary." E-mail interview. 21 Nov. 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016.

of the original.”<sup>58</sup> In reality, even these so-called “unbiased” versions, are often seen for the influences that were really behind them. “The ESV is also weak in some passages that have been used by Calvinists to teach double predestination. The wording of the ESV is more Calvinistic than the NIV in these passages. Of course, the NIV has long been criticized by some Lutherans for supposedly showing Reformed influence.”<sup>59</sup> It does not seem possible to have a translation of any sort, that does not at least reflect in some way the translator’s belief. Professor Cherney wrote in his paper *Doctrinal, Exegetical, Translational*,

An exegetical question involves those cases where the textual evidence, vocabulary, syntax, and context (including the context of all of Scripture) permit a passage to be understood in more than one way. For example, who or what is “coming” in Isaiah 66:6 (Hebrew)—the Lord, a time for judgment, or something else? In John 14:1, did Jesus give his disciples two commands, one, or none? In Matthew 27:65 did Pilate tell the Jews, “Take a guard” (NIV 1984 & 2011)? Or did he say, “You have a guard” (ESV, NKJV)?<sup>60</sup>

Since such exegetical questions do exist, would it not be beneficial in some circumstances, to have a translation that seems to have “Lutheran” influences? Not that it would be a Bible that pushed Lutheran doctrine into the text, and the men who are currently working on the EHV are fully aware of that pitfall, “They understand that while it might be sectarian to *translate* the Bible, “Jesus said this is my *true* body,” it is not sectarian to *confess*, “This is the true body and blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The translators understand the difference between presenting a Lutheran understanding of Scripture in a confessional statement and importing that interpretation into the words of a translation.”<sup>61</sup>

Using the example of the ESV and the seemingly Calvinistic influence sometimes found there, in 1 Peter 2:8 the ESV says, “They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do.” Would not a Lutheran translation be a beneficial one, if it avoided words like

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<sup>58</sup> Professor Nass, Professor of Hebrew Martin Luther College." E-mail interview. 23 Nov. 2016.

<sup>59</sup> Nass, Thomas P, 2011. Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation, Presented at the St. Croix Pastors’ Conference in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, on February 8, 2011, and at the New Ulm/Redwood Falls Pastors’ Conference in Fairmont, Minnesota, on March 1, 2011. Thomas Nass teaches at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota., accessed via *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, (accessed September 6, 2016) p 3

<sup>60</sup> Cherney, Kenneth. "Doctrinal, Exegetical, Translational." *BIBLE TRANSLATION*. <http://bibletranslation.welsrc.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/38/2013/04/WRC-AOM-Enfold-logo.png>, 2015. Web. 25 Nov. 2016.

<sup>61</sup> "FAQs #8." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

“destined” or the idea that this was always the case for these people?<sup>62</sup> Especially since the original Greek word ἐτέθησαν is not some special word for “destined” but rather from the simple word for ‘put,’ ‘place,’ or ‘appoint’. This then very simply means that “some people disobey the message, and this appoints them to stumble.”<sup>63</sup> Having a Bible translation that is made from a Lutheran background seems then, only serve to help, rather than to harm.

It is interesting to draw parallels to Luther’s Bible when talking about who is doing the actual translating. While Luther certainly did have other reasons for translating the Bible into German, mostly because other translations of the day were weak. His primary concern was translating the Bible in a way that the people could better understand it.<sup>64</sup> In my interview with Pastor Brian Keller, he wrote, “Today some think that Bible translation must be done in a certain way. I don't think it ever occurred to Luther to put someone on his own translation team who was "Roman Catholic" or "Reformed/Zwinglian" just to do it. Yet, he used the resources of Erasmus. He consulted with Jewish Hebraists (as well as German butchers).<sup>65</sup> The idea of a Bible not being worthwhile, just because it doesn’t have multi-denominational input is a relatively new idea.

Luther first translated the New Testament by himself. Then he sought the help of those with whom he was in church fellowship (Philip Melancthon, for example). Luther did not translate the Old Testament alone. He formed a translation team that he called his “Sanhedrin.” These were all men who were in confessional agreement with him. According to Mathesius, this group consisted of his fellow professors at Wittenberg: Johann Bugenhagen, Justus Jonas, Caspar Creuziger, Philip Melancthon, and Mattheus Aurogallus. Georg Roerer, the *Korrektor*, was also present. Frequently other friends, doctors, and learned men came to take part in this important work, such as Bernhard Ziegler and Johann Forster. (See E. G. Schwiebert, *Luther and His Times*, p. 649). In essence, Luther’s entire team was comprised of what we would call “Lutherans” today.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Nass, Thomas P, 2011. Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation, Presented at the St. Croix Pastors’ Conference in Eden Prairie, Minnesota, on February 8, 2011, and at the New Ulm/Redwood Falls Pastors’ Conference in Fairmont, Minnesota, on March 1, 2011. Thomas Nass teaches at Martin Luther College in New Ulm, Minnesota., accessed via *Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary Essay File*, (accessed September 6, 2016) p 4

<sup>63</sup> Jeske, Mark A. *General Epistles*. St. Louis: Concordia House, 2005. Print. People's Bible Commentary.

<sup>64</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

<sup>65</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>66</sup> "FAQs #25." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

This is not to say that if Luther were alive today, he would take on such a project or do it in the same way, but rather just to show how it can be done. Luther used a relatively small grouping of “Lutherans” and his translation was recognized as “the Bible of the German-speaking people for centuries to come. There were other German translations before and after Luther’s. But, without controversy, Luther’s was the most used German Bible translation, and it was made entirely by Lutherans.”<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, to hope that the EHV could be Luther’s Bible is idealistic at best, but it certainly does stand to reason that it could be a valuable resource for the Lutheran church, and even beyond. This is not even to say that the Wartburg Project seeks to only emulate Luther’s model either. Though a majority of the translating, revising process is being done by WELS and ELS members, the reviewing process intends to include a wide range of Christians.

We do already receive helps and evaluation from outside of our immediate circle. We have been contacted by scholars from outside of our fellowship. We've already received some input from outside of our fellowship. When the translation is complete, we will welcome suggestions from external reviewers. I am sure that we will be sending review copies of the EHV to quite a number of reviewers who are not in WELS/ELS. Just as Lutherans have been welcomed to comment on translations that originated in Baptist or Reformed churches, EHV, which has its starting point in Lutheran churches, will welcome users of EHV from other churches to submit suggestions to help improve the translation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

<sup>68</sup> "Pastor Brian Keller, New Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 14 Nov. 2016

## Marketability and Potential Benefits for the Greater Church

While this paper is not at all meant to be an attack on one translation, the revoking of the rights to the NIV 1984 text was indeed a large blow to many denominations of Christianity. The removal of that translation has left many searching for a new translation for publications and use in worship because they find that the new NIV 2011 may be moving in a dangerous direction. Many different denominations of Lutherans have left NIV,<sup>69</sup> as well as the Reformed Churches of the United States and Canada,<sup>70</sup> the Orthodox Presbyterians<sup>71</sup> and many other evangelicals.<sup>72</sup> Even the Southern Baptist Convention, one of the largest Christian denominations in America, banned the sales of this version by their major publishing company in a resolution of their 2011 meeting in Arizona,

WHEREAS, Many Southern Baptist pastors and laypeople have trusted and used the 1984 New International Version (NIV) translation to the great benefit of the Kingdom; and

WHEREAS, Biblica and Zondervan Publishing House are publishing an updated version of the New International Version (NIV) which incorporates gender neutral methods of translation; and

WHEREAS, Southern Baptists repeatedly have affirmed our commitment to the full inspiration and authority of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:15-16) and, in 1997, urged every Bible publisher and translation group to resist “gender-neutral” translation of Scripture; and

WHEREAS, This translation alters the meaning of hundreds of verses, most significantly by erasing gender-specific details which appear in the original language; and

WHEREAS, Although it is possible for Bible scholars to disagree about translation methods or which English words best translate the original languages, the 2011 NIV has gone beyond acceptable translation standards; and

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<sup>69</sup> "CTCR Staff Opinion on Inclusive Language in the NIV 2011." LCMS. Web. 5 Dec. 2016.

<sup>70</sup> Pontier, Ralph A. "Why Is the NIV 2011 a Problem for Our Churches?" [Http://storage.cloversites.com/emmanuelreformedchurch/documents/What Bible Shall We Use 2012 02 17.doc.pdf](http://storage.cloversites.com/emmanuelreformedchurch/documents/What Bible Shall We Use 2012 02 17.doc.pdf). United Reformed Church, Web. 4 Dec. 2016.

<sup>71</sup> "Question and Answer." *Orthodox Presbyterian Church*. [www.opc.org/qa.html?question\\_id=7](http://www.opc.org/qa.html?question_id=7) Web. 05 Dec. 2016.

<sup>72</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

WHEREAS, Seventy-five percent of the inaccurate gender language found in the TNIV is retained in the 2011 NIV; and

WHEREAS, The Southern Baptist Convention has passed a similar resolution concerning the TNIV in 2002; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, That the messengers of the Southern Baptist Convention meeting in Phoenix, Arizona, June 14-15, 2011 express profound disappointment with Biblica and Zondervan Publishing House for this inaccurate translation of God's inspired Scripture; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we encourage pastors to make their congregations aware of the translation errors found in the 2011 NIV; and be it further

RESOLVED, That we respectfully request that LifeWay not make this inaccurate translation available for sale in their bookstores; and be it finally

RESOLVED, That we cannot commend the 2011 NIV to Southern Baptists or the larger Christian community.

The language that is used in the resolution, sounds very similar to the problems that other denominations have stated and is even similar to some of the problems that have been addressed in this paper. Professor Brug may have summarized it best when he said, "Another way of putting the question is: what percentage of food has to be poison before the food is poison, or how many parts per million of carcinogens in our food and drink do we find acceptable?"<sup>73</sup> But the degree to which this translation has defected is not the main point at hand here. What is to be gathered from this resolution, is that other church bodies are looking for a translation that is fully committed to God's Word as the inspired inerrant Word of God, and will not be swayed by the culture "swings" of the times. While there are good translations out now, how long can Christians continue to look to these other, multi-denomination, predominantly evangelical translations to continue that way? Along with that comes the concern that other major Bible translations may "pull the rug out from under your feet" as the NIV did when they no longer allowed publications with their older version. This issue is no longer just about the WELS, but many Christians are now looking for a translation that is not only faithful to the Word of God but also reliable for dispersion to the masses.

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<sup>73</sup> Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.



This is exactly the kind of translation that the EHV hopes to be. Their rubrics for translation state,

2. Translators will strive for a balance between preserving the original meaning and producing English which sounds natural, but the preservation of meaning takes priority.
3. When a choice must be made, accuracy in conveying the divinely intended meaning of the text takes priority over literary beauty or rendering the text into common, contemporary English.
4. The translation must be free of doctrinal errors whether inadvertent or deliberate. It must not falsify the Word of God. It must not subtract from its meaning or add to it.<sup>74</sup>

These are translational principals that apply to more than just Lutherans, but really would be beneficial to the whole catholic church here on earth based on the biblical stances taken by these other denominations.

The other obvious draw of the EHV is that it has plans of remaining available in every version for those who choose to use it,

The EHV is a gift to the church. It is being produced at very low cost because of the abundance of volunteer labor. We have also promised that the EHV will not deny people who have obtained rights to use the EHV in derivative works like commentaries or study Bibles the right to continue to use the version of the EHV which they have adopted, even if new versions of the EHV appear someday.<sup>75</sup>

While most of this will remain speculation until the EHV is finally in print, there are signs that point towards the positive,

I do not think many of us expected that Concordia Publishing House would adopt the People's Bible in spite of the fact that it contains statements not in agreement with the doctrinal position of the LCMS. If 15-20% of the LCMS can be interested in a Bible that is more readable than ESV, our potential market would be doubled. Some Southern Baptists want a translation less literal than NASB and closer to the original than NIV or HCSB. There are 11 million Southern Baptists. Who knows? Maybe there will be more Baptists that use our translation than WELS members that do.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> "The Wartburg Project." [wartburgproject.org/rubrics](http://wartburgproject.org/rubrics). *The Wartburg Project*. Web. 03 Nov. 2016.

<sup>75</sup> "FAQs #25." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). *The Wartburg Project*. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Brug, John F. "A "Lutheran" Translation?? Pitfalls and Potential." *The Wartburg Project- FAQs*. 2016. Web. 25 Nov. 2016.

This would open the door to other interesting possibilities for personal use and Bible study. One of the major drawbacks of not using a translation that is made by WELS members has been the cost of putting out materials with a published text in them. It was deemed not feasible to produce a Study Bible, or other Bible study material using the NIV, ESV, or Holman Christian Bible because the cost of royalties to those companies would be far too much.<sup>77</sup> Some of the numbers cited in 2012 were, “NIV 10%<sup>78</sup>, ESV 2%, HCSB 3-5%.”<sup>79</sup> With the rate of inflation at almost 2% for each year since 2012,<sup>80</sup> one would have to imagine this number would be even more out of reach. One factor however that is not out of reach is the 0% that we would have to pay in royalties if we owned the rights to our translation. At a lower cost for publishing these materials, more materials could be published. Materials that once again, would not be aimed only at WELS Lutherans, but at the church at large. Finally, that would allow for more, good, biblical, doctrinal material to be put in front of more people. As was already stated, putting good resources in people’s hands, is the name of the game.

### **Principles from God’s Word**

Unfortunately, when speaking of biblical background for the question, “Should we translate our own version of God’s Word?” there is no direct answer. Nowhere in the Bible, regardless of what translation you are using, does God say, “You must or must not make a new translation if there are others already available,” but there certainly are some biblical principles, and encouragement to keep in mind.

The first biblical thought to keep in mind comes from Psalm 1:1-3,

Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of mockers.

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<sup>77</sup> "Professor Emeritus John Brug, Old Testament Editor EHV." E-mail interview. 26 Nov. 2016.

<sup>78</sup> Note: Zondervan royalty fees are calculated differently than other publishers. They charge their royalty fee on the full retail price rather than the wholesale discount price. This would make it difficult for NPH to sell a WELS NIV study Bible at any discounted prices, such as a clergy discount, or at any discounted price to other Christian bookstores, such as the MLC and WLS campus bookstores. (Translation Feasibility Report findings. p 3)

<sup>79</sup> Report. Translation Feasibility Committee, Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod. *Report to the Districts- May 17, 2012*. WELS. Web. 30 Nov. 2016. p. 3

<sup>80</sup> "Current US Inflation Rates: 2006-2016." US Inflation Calculator. 2016. Web. 06 Dec. 2016.

<sup>2</sup> But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
and on his law, he meditates day and night.  
<sup>3</sup> He is like a tree planted by streams of water,  
which yields its fruit in season  
and whose leaf does not wither.  
Whatever he does prospers. NIV 1984

Regardless of their conclusion, what a blessing it has been, for so many people--so many Christians--to be drawn back into their Bibles for further study of the Scriptures, even checking up on the minutest details of the text. All of this done in the name of the preservation of the Word of God. One can only imagine that it has been a treat and a privilege for the men of the Wartburg Project to dig deeper than they may have ever imagined into different parts of the Scriptures in translating. While Christians never really need a reason to read the Bible, besides the fact that it is the Bible, this new translation poses new, once-in-a-lifetime opportunities to be a part of the evaluation of a new translation as well.<sup>81</sup> Think of all those people, who through meditation on the Word, have been even further “firmly planted” in their faith so that their plants of faith do not struggle, but thrive. To God be the glory!

Secondly, it is good to look at what God himself says about his Word. God says in the closing words in the book of Revelation, “And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book. He who testifies to these things says, “Yes, I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus.” (Revelation 22:19, 20 NIV 1984) God is very serious about his Word. It is not something that man is to use for his own benefit by adding or subtracting to or from it. This is no small matter to consider when talking about translating the Word of God exactly as the divinely inspired writers meant it. In fact, God says this offense is worthy of being removed from the Book of Life. It is good then, that we consider and handle God’s Word with the precision, and accuracy that he demands. Not making concessions for the sake of ease, or adding to it because we think it may be “more beneficial.” Finally, the day is coming when the Lord Jesus will return, and it is a far easier question to answer, “Why did you fight so hard for my Word?” than “Why did you not cling to every Word of Truth?”

Finally, it is important to remember what exactly this word is, “I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any

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<sup>81</sup> "FAQs #27." [wartburgproject.org/faqs/](http://wartburgproject.org/faqs/). The Wartburg Project. Web. 10 Nov. 2016.

means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished.” (Matthew 5:18 NIV 1984) Man can only do so much. Finally, Jesus has given us his promise that his Word is not going to disappear before he comes back. All that man can do is trust what God has said. This is not all on us to protect the Word of God, but we have the power of one much greater than we are. We have a God who has also promised, “so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” (Isaiah 55:11 NIV 1984) It is not our ultimate goal here on earth to craft the perfect translation, but rather to proclaim the Word that God has given us to the world. Our goal is that as many people as possible believe in their Savior from sin, and the only way that happens, is God working through his Word, proclaimed by his people. It is good to study and even obsess over God’s Word and meaningful ways to convey that truth, but let us not forget our real calling, to proclaim it!

### **Conclusion**

The Lutheran church was built on three *solas*: *Sola Gratia*, *sola Fide*, and *sola Scriptura*. These are the “hills” that all confessional Lutherans are willing to die on. We believe that it is by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in the Scripture alone. Therefore, we do all that we can to protect that third *sola*, the Scripture. The aim of this paper has been to show that, from the history of our church body, from the current position of today’s culture, and from the Word of God, publishing a Lutheran translation would be a purely positive and beneficial undertaking.

From the history of the Wisconsin Synod it has been shown that even from the beginnings of the English Bible, Lutherans have talked about, even desired, a translation done by men of their own doctrinal background. While the churches have carried on, and thrived while using others translations, it was not because any one of those translations was the most ideal English translation, but rather because God promises to work wherever his Word is preached. In fact, the switching between many “unofficially official” translations has been a cause of more division among churches, than cause for unity. Perhaps a translation published in our own circles would help to bring some unity and long term stability in an area of the church that hasn’t experienced such a unity since the days of the *Luther Bibel*.

From the past to our present times, there has been quite a switch in Evangelical hermeneutics, as well as the sheer volume of translations that are available. With this massive

influx of translations, and the waning of hermeneutical principles, it is simply no longer the case that everyone is using the same translation. NIV was the closest thing available to a common translation for everyone, but they made it clear where they stand with their new revisions and the pulling of their 1984 text from publication. This not so subtle change was felt by much of conservative Christianity today, and the people responded as they saw fit. Since the switch in 2011, the use of NIV as the Bible of choice according to one source has gone down almost 15%.<sup>82</sup> Besides the dip in personal use of the NIV 2011, some denominations have even gone so far as to ban the use of this version in their worship services. Without that weighty translation ruling the market as it once did, the market for good Bible translations is wide open. If people find the EHV to be a faithful translation, there is no reason to think that it could not gain wide acceptance by more people than just the WELS. It may just be that the world is ready for a Bible translation that is done in updated English, but not updated world views. This will have to remain speculation until this Bible is published, but there is no reason to be worried or against this new translation, because in the end, God will use this work just the perfect way he intends.

Finally, it has been such an encouragement, and privilege to have taken the time to study this topic and to see all of the concern, and love for the Word of God that is still in the world today. It is amazing to see how God has motivated so many Christians to put time and effort into a project, not for personal profit or gain, but simply to produce a product that will enable more and more people to hear the Word of God in its truth and purity. It has been a privilege to read the work of other men concerned by what this translation may look like, and the ill effects such a project could have if it isn't undertaken in a careful manner. After seeing all of the facts, the evidence, speculations, and concerns, hopefully, this paper has shown that a Lutheran translation would be a very positive blessing for Lutherans and non-Lutherans alike. It would be especially beneficial if it opens new doors to resources, and demonstrates a serious reverence and love for protecting the Word of God just the way he originally gave it to us. No matter how God decides to use these efforts, we pray that he continue to bless the studying and preservation of His Word until he comes to take his children home.

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<sup>82</sup> "The Most Popular and Fastest Growing Bible Translation Isn't What You Think It Is." *Gleanings / ChristianityToday.com*. Web. 06 Dec. 2016.

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## APPENDIX A

### Updating the New International Version of the Bible: Notes from the Committee on Bible Translation

#### *What is the New International Version?*

When the original Bible documents first emerged, they captured exactly what God wanted to say in the language and idiom of ordinary people. There was no friction between hearing God's Word the way it was written and understanding it the way it was meant. The original audience experienced a unique fusion of these two ingredients.

Readers of the Bible today, however, can no longer experience this fusion. The passage of two thousand years has turned the Greek and Hebrew of Bible times from living languages into historical artifacts. If we had the original documents in our hands today, they would still represent exactly what God wanted to say. But the vast majority of people would no longer be able to understand them.

In 1611, the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible sought to bring English readers back as close to that original fusion as possible. As with all translations, the transition from the original languages to Elizabethan English involved some loss of transparency to the original documents. And yet that small loss in transparency was more than made up for by a tremendous gain in comprehensibility: People could hear God's Word in their own language! The result propelled the body of Christ into a new era of personal transformation and global reformation.

But, just like the original documents, the KJV was unable to escape the effects of time. The English language changed. The "thys" and "thous" and "whosoever" of the KJV became less and less the language of everyday people and more and more the language of a bygone age. The KJV's ability to present God's Word the way it was written, while at the same time allowing readers to understand it the way it was meant, began to decline.

In the last century, a number of excellent new English Bible translations have emerged to fill this void.

Some translations place a particularly high priority on hearing God's Word the way it was written—giving the modern English reader the opportunity to see much of the form and structure of the original documents. Ease of understanding varies from verse to verse and from book to book according to the complexity of the source material. But all verses and all books adhere to a high standard of transparency to the original languages.

Other translations place a particularly high priority on understanding God's Word the way it was meant—helping the modern English reader to grasp the content of the Bible in their own words and their own idioms. Transparency to the form and structure of the original documents varies from verse to verse and from book to book. But all verses and all books adhere to a high standard of comprehensibility.

Since its first emergence as a complete text in 1978, the New International Version (NIV) has stood as the modern pioneer of a different approach—an approach that mirrors the balance of priorities held by the KJV translators four hundred years ago. The NIV tries to bring its readers as close as possible to the experience of the original audience: providing the best possible blend of transparency to the original documents and comprehension of the original meaning in every verse. The NIV is founded on the belief that if hearing God's Word the way it was written *and* understanding it the way it was meant were the hallmarks of the original reading experience, then accuracy in translation demands that neither one of these two criteria be prioritized above the other.

Built upon this philosophy, the NIV has experienced much the same reaction in the church and beyond as its beloved predecessor whose values it seeks to emulate. Thirty years after its first publication there are more than four hundred million NIV Bibles in print.

But, unlike its predecessor, the NIV was designed from the very start with a built-in mechanism to defy the attritional effects of time. Since 1978, the NIV translation team has continued to meet, year after year, reviewing developments in biblical scholarship and changes in English usage—revising the translation to ensure that it

continues to offer its readers an experience that mirrors that of the original audience, and periodically releasing those revisions in updated editions of the text.

### *Updating the NIV for 2011*

The chief goal of every revision to the NIV text is to bring the translation into line both with contemporary biblical scholarship and with shifts in English idiom and usage. In 1984, various corrections and revisions to the NIV text were made. A lengthy revision process was completed in 2005, resulting in the separately published *Today's New International Version* (TNIV). This updated NIV builds on both the original NIV and the TNIV and represents the latest effort of the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) to articulate God's unchanging Word in the way the original authors might have said it if they had been speaking in English to the global English-speaking audience today.

**First, it's important to stress that about 95% of the text of the updated NIV is exactly the same as the 1984 text it replaces.** The majority of what *has* changed involves comparatively minor matters of vocabulary, sentence structure and punctuation: changes that move the NIV from the English of 1984 to the English of 2011. Other changes are more substantive, reflecting the advances in biblical scholarship over the last three decades. **Reasons for changing the text in the new edition fall into three basic categories:**

#### **1. Changes in English.** For example:

- Who would have guessed in the 1970s that, within a few decades, an "alien" would mean, thanks to the influence of *ET* and other movies and TV shows, an "extraterrestrial being"? In the updated NIV, "alien" has been replaced with "foreigner" or similar words in order to communicate the intention of God's Word accurately to contemporary English readers. See, for instance, Genesis 23:4: "I am a foreigner and stranger among you . . ."
- "Ankle chains" refer much more often to prison manacles than to the type of personal adornments described in Isaiah 3:20. The modern fashion of wearing jewelry around the ankle has led to the widespread use of the word "anklet" to describe this piece of jewelry, and this is the word used in the updated NIV.
- In Exodus 4:14 Aaron's "heart will be glad when he sees" Moses, but today we would just render this Semitic idiom as "he will be glad to see you"—as the updated NIV does.
- And how many readers today would use the word "overweening" in a sentence, much less be able to define it? Moab's "overweening pride" in Isaiah 16:6 and Jeremiah 48:29 has therefore now become her "great . . . arrogance."

#### **2. Progress in Scholarship.** For example:

- We are more certain than we were forty years ago that the Greek word *kataluma* used in Luke 2:7 means "guest room," not "inn."
- We likewise know that those crucified on either side of Jesus (called *lēstai*) were "rebels" rather than "robbers" (e.g., Mark 15:27).
- We now know that the word translated "demons" in the original NIV of Psalm 106:37 is more accurately translated "false gods."
- Joseph's "richly ornamented robe" (Genesis 37:3) suggests a garment with decorations hanging from it, but drawings and descriptions of comparable clothing from antiquity now suggest that "ornate" is the best adjective to use.
- When the NIV was first translated, the meaning of the rare Greek word *harpagmos*, rendered "something to be grasped," in Philippians 2:6 was uncertain. But further study has

shown that the word refers to something that a person has in their possession but chooses not to use to their own advantage. The updated NIV reflects this new information, making clear that Jesus really was equal with God when he determined to become a human for our sake: “[Christ Jesus], being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.”

3. *Concern for Clarity.* For example:

- Why retain, “when Jacob saw Rachel daughter of Laban, his mother’s brother . . .,” when you can say, “when Jacob saw Rachel daughter of his uncle Laban . . .” (Genesis 29:10)—especially when the immediate context goes on to specify which side of Jacob’s family she came from (v. 13)?
- The 1984 NIV rendition of Leviticus 4:19-20 reads, “He shall remove all the fat from it and burn it on the altar, and do with this bull just as he did with the bull for the sin offering. In this way the priest will make atonement for them . . .” But this leaves a question hanging in English that is not left hanging in the original—is the priest making atonement for the bulls or for the people? Better to clarify, as in the updated edition: “In this way the priest will make atonement for the community.”
- In place of “if only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both,” Job 9:33 now reads, “if only there were someone to mediate between us, someone to bring us together.”
- The Greek relative pronoun in Matthew 1:18b is feminine singular, making it clear that the “whom” in the phrase “of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ,” refers back only to Mary, not to both Mary and Joseph. Rephrasing this half-verse as, “and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah,” makes this crystal clear.
- The Corinthian slogan in 1 Corinthians 7:1 was captured best in the original NIV footnote, which has now become the text: “It is good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman” (a view Paul had to qualify before he could endorse it).
- And one shouldn’t be as easily able to misapply Philippians 4:13 now that it reads, “I can do all this through him who gives me strength” (i.e., to be content in all circumstances, whether in riches or in poverty), rather than “I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”

### *How Was the Update Produced?*

Under the terms of the original NIV charter, the Committee on Bible Translation is charged with the responsibility of monitoring developments in English usage and biblical scholarship and reflecting these developments in the text. The committee has therefore always welcomed proposals to amend the text, both from its own members and from interested scholars and readers. All proposed changes are studied and vetted by committee members, discussed and voted on. Changes are not made easily. The committee honors the excellent work of earlier translators and appreciates the widespread popularity of the translation. **Therefore a change is introduced into the text only if at least 70 percent of the committee members present at the time of the voting agree to it.**

For this revision to the NIV, particular attention has been paid to external feedback in the area of gender language. As stated in the September 1, 2009, announcement regarding the planned update, **every single change introduced into the committee’s last major revision (the TNIV) relating to inclusive language for humanity was reconsidered.** Some were preserved, some were abolished in favor of the 1984 rendering and many were reworded in a third, still different way.

In matters unrelated to gender language—which account for about 75 percent of the changes made from the 1984 NIV to the TNIV—the committee’s work has been further developed, and in places critiqued, for the updated NIV. Careful readers will notice many previously unseen enhancements to accuracy and readability in the new text alongside others that have already been seen in the TNIV.

The committee wishes to express its thanks to every Bible scholar, minister, missionary and lay person who responded to our call for suggestions as part of this revision process. Every proposal was evaluated, and those considered most worthy of possible inclusion were brought before the committee as a whole. Many of these proposals have led to revisions to the text and many more, purely due to shortage of time, have been tabled for discussion at future meetings for potential inclusion in future updates. Maintenance and improvement of the NIV is a never-finished work, and we count ourselves blessed to have such a rich engagement with thoughtful and critical Christians who share our devotion to the unchanging truth of God’s Word.

The committee today is as diverse as it has ever been, although it recognizes the need to diversify still further. Our top priority is locating willing and able members with a high level of expertise in the Greek of the New Testament and/or the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament. Usually this means scholars with Ph.D.s in one or the other sub-disciplines of biblical studies. Facility with writing in fluent English is also obviously a high priority. As of August 2010, the committee was comprised of twelve American scholars, two British scholars and one Indian scholar. Of the fifteen committee members, thirteen are men and two are women. Most of the major theological traditions of Protestant evangelicalism are represented. The committee prizes denominational diversity as well: Current members belong to Baptist, Presbyterian or Reformed, Anglican, Pentecostal, and independent denominations and churches. If past committee members are included, this diversity becomes even greater.

### *What Was Decided About Inclusive Language?*

**Nowhere** in the updated NIV (nor in the TNIV, nor in any of the committee discussions leading up to either version) **is there even the remotest hint of any inclusive language for God.** The revisions solely surround inclusive language for mankind.

All previous Bible translation efforts have been hampered by the lack of accurate, statistically significant data on the state of spoken and written English at a given time in its history. Beyond appealing to traditional style guides, all that translators and stylists have been able to do is rely on their own experiences and others’ anecdotal evidence, resulting in arguments such as, “I never see anybody writing such-and-such,” or “I always hear such-and-such,” or “Sometimes I read one thing but other times something else.”

As part of the review of gender language promised at the September 2009 update announcement, the committee sought to remove some of this subjectivity by enlisting the help of experts. The committee initiated a relationship with Collins Dictionaries to use the Collins Bank of English, one of the world’s foremost English language research tools, to conduct a major new study of changes in gender language. The Bank of English is a database of more than 4.4 billion words drawn from text publications and spoken word recordings from all over the world.

Working with some of the world’s leading experts in computational linguistics and using cutting-edge techniques developed specifically for this project, the committee gained an authoritative, and hitherto unavailable, perspective on the contemporary use of gender language—including terms for the human race and subgroups of the human race, pronoun selections following various words and phrases, the use of “man” as a singular generic and the use of “father(s)” and “forefather(s)” as compared to ancestor(s). The project tracked usage and acceptability for each word and phrase over a twenty-year period and also analyzed similarities and differences across different forms of English: for example, UK English, US English, written English, spoken English, and even the English used in a wide variety of evangelical books, sermons and internet sites.

Research of this type is just one tool in the hands of translators, and, of course, it has no bearing on the challenge of preserving transparency to the original text. But hearing God’s Word the way it was written is only one part of the NIV’s overall mission. If readers are to understand it in the way it was meant, translators need to express

the unchanging truths of the Bible in forms of language that modern English speakers find natural and easy to comprehend. And this is where a tool like the Bank of English comes into its own.

The most significant findings that influenced decision making for the updated NIV were:

- *The gender-neutral pronoun "they" ("them"/"their") is by far the most common way that English-language speakers and writers today refer back to singular antecedents such as "whoever," "anyone," "somebody," "a person," "no one," and the like.* Even in Evangelical sermons and books, where the generic "he," "him" and "his" are preserved more frequently than in other forms of communication, instances of what grammarians are increasingly calling the "singular they" ("them" or "their") appear three times more frequently than generic masculine forms. In other words, most English speakers today express themselves in sentences like these: "No one who rooted for the Chicago Cubs to be in a World Series in the last sixty years got *their* wish. *They* were disappointed time and time again," or "The person who eats too many hot dogs in too short a period of time is likely to become sick to *their* stomach." It is interesting to observe that this development is a throwback to a usage of English that existed prior to the solidification of the generic "he" as the only "proper" usage during the nineteenth century in Victorian England. Even the KJV occasionally used expressions like ". . . let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). For that matter, so did the Greek New Testament! In James 2:15-16, the Greek for "a brother or sister" (*adelphos ē adelphē*) is followed by plural verbs and predicate adjectives and referred back to with *autois* ("them").
- *English speakers around the world are using a variety of terms to refer to men and women together and for the human race collectively.* Plural words such as "people," "human beings," and "humans" are very widely used. When it comes to terms that focus on humans in a collective sense, "man," "mankind," "humanity," and "the human race" are all being used.
- *"Forefather" has all but disappeared from the English language as a generic term, being replaced by "ancestor."* Even in Evangelical sermons and writings, "ancestor" is more than twice as common as "forefather."

In the light of these and other findings, the committee adopted a set of guidelines to be applied during the NIV update process in cases where the original Greek and Hebrew texts clearly indicate an intended application to mixed groups of men and women and not just to individual men (or women) or groups of men (or women). None of these principles was applied inflexibly. How a specific usage sounded in a given context or how that context made it likely to be read was always taken into consideration. But, in general, much more often than not:

- *Using plurals instead of singulars to deal with generic forms was avoided.* Except for some instances where all alternatives proved awkward or potentially misleading, singular nouns or substantive participles in the biblical languages were translated with singular nouns or noun equivalents in English ("The one who. . .," "the person who. . .," "whoever. . .," and the like).
- *Using second person forms instead of third person forms to deal with generics was avoided.* In other words, the translation does not read, "You who have this-or-that should do such-and-such," to avoid saying "He who has this-or-that should do such-and-such." The exception to this rule was when a second person form was already present in the immediate context and it would be poor English style not to preserve it throughout. For example, addressing a mixed-gender audience, we would say, "If any of you has *your* car on campus, may I get a ride home?" rather than "If any of you has *his* (or *their*) car on campus, may I get a ride home?"

- **Singular “they,” “them” and “their” forms were widely used to communicate the generic significance of pronouns and their equivalents when a singular form had already been used for the antecedent.** For example, “Whoever has will be given more; whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them” (Mark 4:25); “How much more severely do you think someone deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified them . . . ?” (Hebrews 10:29); or “Anyone who is never at fault in what they say is perfect, able to keep their whole body in check” (James 3:2b). At the same time, recognizing the diversity in modern English, a generic “he” was occasionally retained: “If I have rejoiced at my enemy’s misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him . . .” (Job 31:29).
- **“People” and “humans” (and “human beings”) were widely used for Greek and Hebrew masculine forms referring to both men and women. A variety of words—“humanity,” “human race,” “man,” “mankind”—were used to refer to human beings collectively.** As we noted above, modern English uses a variety of terms to refer to human beings collectively; and the committee decided to imitate that diversity in the translation, determining which expression fit best in each specific context. In making the decision whether to use “man” or “mankind,” the committee often preferred the latter for the sake of clarity. “Man” can mean either “the human race” or “an individual (male) human being,” and when a follow-up pronoun is required, the pronoun must be “he,” creating the potential for misunderstanding. “Mankind,” on the other hand, can only mean humanity as a whole, and the follow-up pronoun can be an inclusive “they.” Nevertheless, the updated NIV often uses “man,” particularly in memorable and/or proverbial phrases: for example, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27). Examples of texts that now have “mankind” where they didn’t before include: “Let us make mankind in our image” (Genesis 1:26a); “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12); and “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5).
- **“Ancestors” was regularly preferred to “forefathers” unless a specific, limited reference to the patriarchs or to another all-male group is intended.**
- **“Brothers and sisters” was frequently used to translate adelphoi in the New Testament, especially in the vocative, when it was clear that both genders were in view.** This decision reflects the consensus view among scholars (and with basis in the dictionaries) that plural adelphoi refers to both men and women equally. Footnotes now often appear, explaining that “the Greek word for ‘brothers and sisters’ (adelphoi) refers to believers, both men and women, as part of God’s family.”

While some uses of “believers” were retained from the TNIV where “brothers and sisters” became too awkward, many were replaced by “brothers and sisters” to retain the familial connotations of adelphoi.

- **While the Greek word anēr (“man” or “person”) was frequently translated with masculine forms in English, it is clear in several contexts that the word refers to men and women equally (an option endorsed by major dictionaries of the Greek NT).** The parallelism between James 1:7 and 8 suggests that anthrōpos and anēr are synonyms; hence, “That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. Such a person is double-minded and unstable in all they do.” In Acts, expressions addressing mixed-gender audiences such as “Fellow Israelites” (for andres Israēlītai) accurately capture the sense of the Greek. In Acts 17:22 andres Athēnaioi cannot be rendered, “Fellow Athenians,” because Paul was not from Athens. But “people of Athens” works well, especially since verse 34 shows that at least one woman, Damaris, was among those explicitly addressed.

As we have said, none of these principles was implemented rigidly without sensitivity to the context and cadence of individual verses. How clusters of words sounded when read aloud, what meaning the immediate context of any given passage contributed to a translational debate and what would communicate the original author's intentions most clearly were always taken into account.

### *What Happened to Some of the Most Famous Texts on Gender Roles?*

Almost nothing has changed in the translation of the majority of these texts from the 1984 NIV to the updated NIV. But the careful reader will notice a few differences. Most notable perhaps are:

- **Romans 16:1-2** now reads, "I commend to you our sister, Phoebe, a deacon [*diakonos*] of the church in Cenchreae. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of his people and to give her any help she may need from you, for she has been the benefactor [*prostatis*] of many people, including me." Complementarian and egalitarian scholars alike are increasingly agreeing that *diakonos* here means "deacon" (not just "servant," though "servant" is provided as an alternative in the footnote; see also the New Living Translation [NLT] and the New Revised Standard Version [NRSV]) and that *prostatis* means a patron or benefactor (as in the English Standard Version [ESV] and the Holman Christian Standard Bible [HCSB]), not just someone who was a "great help" in some unspecified way. But, because different churches use labels for offices or leadership roles in so many, sometimes conflicting, senses, a footnote now explains that "deacon refers to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways."
- **1 Corinthians 11:10** now reads, "It is for this reason that a woman ought to have authority over her own head." The expression "a sign of" before "authority" in the 1984 NIV did not correspond to anything explicitly in the Greek and is increasingly recognized as an inadequate rendition of this verse. Whether Paul wanted the women in Corinth to wear an external head covering while praying or prophesying, or simply to have long hair, or maybe even to wear a partial face veil, the point is they should be able to control what they do or do not have on their heads.
- **1 Timothy 2:12** now reads, "I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man." Much debate has surrounded the rare Greek word *authentein*, translated in the 1984 NIV as "exercise authority." The KJV reflected what some have argued was in some contexts a more negative sense for the word: "usurp authority." "Assume authority" is a particularly nice English rendering because it leaves the question open, as it must be unless we discover new, more conclusive evidence. The exercise of authority that Paul was forbidding was one that women inappropriately assumed, but whether that referred to all forms of authority over men in church or only certain forms in certain contexts is up to the individual interpreter to decide. Footnotes to verses 11 and 12 also inform the reader that *anēr* and *gunē* here could mean "husband" and "wife" rather than "man" and "woman."
- **1 Timothy 3:11** now reads, "In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything." A footnote adds, "Possibly deacons' wives or women who are deacons." The Greek root word is *gunē*, which most commonly means simply a "woman." From the context, it is possible that these women were either deacons' wives or women deacons, but neither can be demonstrated from the word alone. The old American Standard Version (ASV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New American Bible (NAB) and the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB) all adopt this translation as well.



### *What Other Improvements Have Been Made?*

Several decisions were made that affected multiple passages, as represented by the following selections:

- **"Saints" often becomes "God's people," "the Lord's people," "the Lord's holy people" and the like.** Most people today think of a particularly good person when they hear the word "saint," whereas in the Bible it translates terminology that regularly refers to all believers. Sometimes the context suggests an emphasis on God's having declared them holy or the process of their becoming more and more holy, so a variety of similar expressions were used depending on the context.
- **Certain uses of "Christ" are now "Messiah."** This was true particularly in the Gospels and Acts, where the word seemed to retain its titular sense of the coming deliverer of the Jews rather than its more common New Testament usage, in which it seems to be virtually equivalent to a second name for Jesus.
- **More uses of "spirit" and related forms, especially in Paul's letters, are now capitalized.** Ancient Greek did not make any distinction between upper-case and lower-case letters, so we cannot know for sure whether "spirit" (*pneuma*) should be capitalized or not. The sense of scholarship today is that "spirit" was not widely used in the ancient Mediterranean world for the disembodied part of a human being. The committee therefore decided to capitalize "spirit" whenever a reference to the Holy Spirit made good sense in a given context.
- **Some occurrences of "Jews," especially in John, have become "Jewish leaders" or something similar.** Since Jesus' first followers were Jewish, the negative statements made about groups of Jews in the New Testament were clearly *never* intended to refer to every living Jew at that time but, at most, to those who rejected Jesus. In many contexts, especially in John, "Jews" appears as a shorthand reference to the particular Jewish leaders who rejected what Jesus did and said, so the updated NIV spells this out in a number of places.
- **Most occurrences of "sinful nature" have become "flesh."** Especially in Paul, *sarx* can mean either part or all of the human body or the human being under the power of sin. In an effort to capture this latter sense of the word, the original NIV often rendered *sarx* as "sinful nature." But this expression can mislead readers into thinking the human person is made up of various compartments, one of which is *sarx*, whereas the biblical writers' point is that humans can choose to yield themselves to a variety of influences or powers, one of which is the sin-producing *sarx*. The updated NIV uses "flesh" as the translation in many places where it is important for readers to decide for themselves from the context whether one or both of these uses of *sarx* is present.
- **Translations that leave open important scholarly options have often been chosen.** Thus, for instance, "righteousness from God" in Romans 1:17 and related passages has been changed to "righteousness of God," and "observing the law" (*erga nomou*) has been changed to "works of the law."
- **There aren't nearly as many "O"s but a number of additional "for"s.** The interjection "O" used in a vocative sense ("O God, help me!") is not nearly as common in spoken or written English as it once was. Where the context suggests that it adds nothing of substance to the text, the updated NIV has left it implied by other vocative nouns rather than separately translated. But it remains in many other contexts. On the other hand, for the sake of smoothness of style and facility of reading, a number of uses of the connective *gar* ("for" or "because") were left untranslated in the 1984 NIV. A select number of these have been restored where they seem particularly crucial to preserving the flow of thought.

Many individual verses were clarified or improved in the updating process. Any selection of these is necessarily very partial and very much based on the particular interests of the people making the selection. But we include here a list of seven of the more well-known texts that have been updated in this new revision of the NIV.

#### **Psalm 23:4**

1984: "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

Updated NIV: "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

A footnote on "valley" gives the alternative, "the valley of the shadow of death."

The HCSB, NLT, NRSV and the New English Translation (NET) all make the same substitution, to clarify what "a shadow of death" means, especially for those readers not familiar with this age-old metaphor.

#### **Malachi 2:16**

1984: "I hate divorce," says the Lord God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the Lord Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith."

Updated NIV: "The man who hates and divorces his wife," says the Lord, the God of Israel, "does violence to the one he should protect," says the Lord Almighty. So be on your guard, and do not be unfaithful."

A footnote gives as an alternative, "I hate divorce," says the LORD, the God of Israel, "because the man who divorces his wife covers his garment with violence, . . ."

In the Hebrew, God's declaration in the first half of this verse is very elliptical and hard to translate. An interlinear reading might yield, "Hating," "divorcing," "and covers," "violence," "upon protection of him"! But how do you put all those concepts together? The first word is a masculine participle, followed by an infinitive construct, suggesting "the man who hates and divorces." "His protection" could refer to clothing, but a more contextually meaningful translation would refer to the one he was supposed to protect, namely, his wife. Most scholars now think that the first half of the verse means something like "the man who hates and divorces" (the ESV follows this interpretation). The more minor changes in the final part of the verse simply use more current English.

#### **2 Corinthians 5:17**

1984: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

Updated NIV: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"

A footnote gives as an alternative, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"

This time it is the Greek that is elliptical, reading simply "new creation." Is it the person in Christ who is the new creation? Yes, of course. But if that's all Paul meant, there are other more natural ways he could have said it. Given his overall theology that the coming of Christ and the new era he inaugurated began the period of the restoration of all things that would culminate in new heavens and new earth, it is likely that Paul is making a much more sweeping claim than just the salvation of the individual believer. A new universe is in the works!

#### **1 Thessalonians 2:14b-15a**

1984: "You suffered from your own countrymen the same things those churches suffered from the Jews, who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out."

Updated NIV: "You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews who killed the Lord Jesus and the prophets and also drove us out."

Besides changing "countrymen" to "people," the only difference between the two editions is the removal of the comma after "Jews." But what an important change! Paul was not claiming that all Jews killed Christ. He was comparing the persecution the new Thessalonian Christians experienced to the persecution that Jewish Christians in Judea suffered from some of the very same leaders in Jerusalem who were in charge of getting Jesus crucified. But to make this restrictive clause clear, the comma must be removed.

#### **Philemon 6**

1984: "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."

Updated NIV: "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."

Paul loves to praise his addressees for qualities that he describes with a pair of nouns, the second being a subjective genitive. 1 Thessalonians 1:3 offers a classic example, in which "your work of faith, labor of love and endurance of hope" means "your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope." That is probably what Paul is doing here, too, as he praises Philemon's "fellowship [*koinōnia*] of faith." In a little letter in which Paul is the one who has evangelized Onesimus (v. 10) but Philemon is known for refreshing the hearts of the Lord's people (v. 7), it is much more likely that Paul is praying for this spirit of concern to enable Philemon to welcome Onesimus back home and not punish him, rather than praying for Philemon to become an outgoing evangelist.

#### **Hebrews 2:6-8**

1984: "But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him? You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet.' In putting everything under him, God left nothing that is not subject to him. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to him."

Updated NIV: "But there is a place where someone has testified: 'What is mankind that you are mindful of them, a son of man that you care for him? You made them a little lower than the angels; you crowned them with glory and honor and put everything under their feet.' In putting everything under them, God left nothing that is not subject to them. Yet at present we do not see everything subject to them."

Footnotes in verses 7-8 also give the options of preserving the masculine singular pronouns.

The big problem here is that Hebrews is quoting Psalm 8:4-6, in which the Psalmist marvels at God's creation and that God should care for puny, mortal humanity in the midst of the entire cosmos. But because the Psalmist spoke of humans collectively as "the son of man," and because, centuries later, Jesus would use "Son of man" as a title for himself, the author of Hebrews realizes that Jesus has now done rightly what Adam and Eve and all previous humans failed to do—exercise proper dominion over all the earth. Many interpreters believe Hebrews does not have Jesus in mind until verse 9, where he is explicitly introduced. Others think he is in view already in the quotation of the Psalm. How does one preserve all of these possible allusions and interconnections, foreclosing on no major interpretive option, while still avoiding exclusively masculine language for both genders if possible?

The solution in the updated NIV is to use "mankind" for "man," to delete the definite article from before "Son of man" (it's not in either the Greek or the Hebrew), to retain the language, "son of man that you

care for him," but to make the remaining pronouns plural so that it is clear they refer to all people, including Jesus.

#### **1 John 2:16**

1984: For everything in the world—the **cravings of sinful man**, the lust of his eyes and the **boasting of what he has and does**—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Updated NIV: "For everything in the world—the **lust of the flesh**, the lust of the eyes, and the **pride of life**—comes not from the Father but from the world."

Has anyone really improved on the KJV rendering of these three expressions, to which the updated NIV returns? Is it unclear even in this four-hundred-year-old wording that John is condemning the evil desires of fallen humanity—how we want everything we see and take inappropriate credit for life and all of its blessings that are really gifts from God? The language still communicates, and the poetry and style to which the NIV has returned is magnificent.

#### *Conclusion*

It has been a profound privilege for us as translators to return, once again, to the vision that first inspired the team who began this great work. When God spoke through the text of the Bible, he said exactly what he wanted to say in the language of everyday people. Two thousand years later, we have sought to give the world a Bible translation that reflects those same priorities: Hear God's Word the way it was written and understand it the way it was meant! Take it, read it, listen to it, pray over it, enjoy it and use it to grow in Christian maturity!

The Committee on Bible Translation  
August, 2010

## Appendix B

### Thoughts on the Translation Issue

WELS President Mark Schroeder

May 2013

The 2013 synod convention will address an important issue that will affect our synod for a generation or more. The issue, which has been under discussion for more than two years, is the selection of a Bible translation for our synod's publications.

On many different occasions, both in public and in private, I have been asked my views on the translation issue. While I have offered my personal opinions when asked, I have not given a detailed response to the question and have not spoken or written extensively about it. I have preferred to respect the process that the synod convention put into place and to allow those who were asked to study the matter to carry out their assignment without undue influence or interference.

But now that the two committees addressing the translation issue have completed their work and presented their reports and recommendations, I feel that I have an obligation to state my opinions and express my convictions about this matter in some detail. I do this not to try to exert undue influence on the decision, but rather to provide to the members of the synod an honest and open summary of what I believe about these issues. I am convinced that I owe this to the members of the synod who have called me to this office. I also recognize that there will be those who disagree with my views for a variety of reasons. I fully respect their right to disagree.

I would also like to express my full agreement with the sentiments voiced by President Paul Wendland, as he writes in the report of the Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC): "Regardless of our decision, this is a time for an extra measure of charity and understanding on the part of all in order to preserve harmony in our fellowship. It is evident that we have differences of opinion in our fellowship regarding both translational philosophy and the merit of individual translations . . . As we go forward, we need to remember not to read hearts nor question motives. We should try to characterize fairly and accurately the views of those who come to conclusions that vary from our own."

God-willing, we will address this issue as brothers and sisters in Christ, united in our faith and doctrine. We will approach this decision prayerfully, asking for God's gracious guidance on what we say, on how we say it, and on the final decision. And we will look to our gracious

God with humble trust that he will bless our decision and preserve the unity of faith and doctrine that he has worked among us.



The report of the Translation Evaluation Committee puts forward two options and asks the synod in convention to give fair consideration to both. The first option presented by the committee is to adopt the 2011 revision of the New International Version (NIV11). The second option is to choose *no* single translation and to charge Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) with the responsibility of using the best available translation for each of its publishing projects.

***I support Option 2 presented by the Translation Evaluation Committee for the near term.***

Related to my support for Option 2 in the near term, ***I believe that we should initiate a project to produce a new or revised translation as a long-term solution.***

I hold these positions having the highest respect for those who served on the Translation Evaluation Committee and on the Translation Feasibility Committee (TFC). Their knowledge of translation issues is extensive. Their commitment to the truth of the Scriptures and their desire to serve the best interests of the synod cannot and should not be questioned. Their work was thorough and exhaustive. Their conclusions and recommendations can and should be received with deep respect and with sincere thanks for the faithful service they have performed with much time, effort, and prayer. By including two options rather than a single recommendation, the TEC is demonstrating that it has no agenda other than to assist the synod in making a wise and God-pleasing decision. In framing its report the way it did, the TFC concludes that the question before us in considering a new/revised translation is not "*Can we?*" but "*Must we?*"

The 1984 version of the NIV (NIV84) has been the translation widely used in our synod and in its publications. When the publisher announced that the NIV84 was being revised and would no longer be published, our synod was faced with a decision. The Translation Evaluation Committee was appointed to

evaluate the NIV revision (usually referred to as the "NIV11") to report its opinion regarding the use of the NIV11 in our synod's publications. The TEC was also asked to investigate whether other existing translations may be suitable and to compare those with the NIV11. The TEC brought its initial findings to the synod convention in 2011. In that report the TEC identified a number of instances in which the NIV11 shows a marked improvement over the NIV84. It also acknowledged that the NIV11 has a number of weaknesses and described those weaknesses in some detail. In the end the committee expressed its opinion that, while there are weaknesses in the NIV11, those weaknesses were not of such a nature that they should prevent WELS from adopting the NIV11. The committee, however, recognized that additional time for study and discussion was needed, and the convention concurred that a decision should be made by a ballot vote at the 2012 district conventions. The 2012 district conventions then voted to provide even more time for study and referred the matter to the 2013 synod convention. The TEC used the additional time to continue its evaluation and to make a thorough verse by verse comparison of the NIV11, the English Standard Version (ESV), and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).

After completing this comparison study with the help of more than 100 volunteer pastors and professors, and after considering the various opinions and concerns of called workers and lay members of the synod, the TEC has now presented two options for the convention to consider. The committee has stated that it would be comfortable with either choice. One option is for WELS to adopt the NIV11 for its publications, which was the initial recommendation made by the TEC. The second option is for WELS to choose no individual translation and to ask NPH to take an eclectic approach, using the best available translation for its various publishing projects.

Another committee, the Translation Feasibility Committee (TFC), was appointed in 2011 to address the feasibility of producing either a new translation or a revision of an existing translation. That committee was to investigate the various pros and cons of such an effort, including the questions of funding, time required, and the availability of qualified manpower. The TFC was also asked to investigate the feasibility of producing a study Bible for the NIV11 that could be used to address problem areas if that translation were chosen. In its report to the convention, the TFC does not reach a definitive conclusion about a study Bible, but it does catalog a number of serious obstacles that would make such a

project very difficult or even inadvisable. As to the question of the feasibility of a new/revised translation, the committee acknowledged the size and challenges of such a task and noted that opinions on this matter vary. The TFC concluded by saying that the key question, in the committee's opinion, is not "Can we?" but "Must we?"

***First, let me explain why I believe that it would not be wise for WELS to adopt the NIV11 for its publications at this time.***

WELS is known as a synod that stands firmly and unapologetically on the verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and infallibility of the Holy Scriptures.

While it is true that no translation is perfect, it is clear that the weaknesses of the NIV11, as identified by the TEC and others, are seen by some within our synod to undermine the confidence they can place in the translation as a whole. These concerns center primarily on the issues of gender neutrality and Messianic prophecy (both important areas). The TEC has stated its view that the NIV11 does not explicitly deny or undermine any scriptural doctrines. Others within our fellowship see the identified weaknesses and hold the view that, taken together, these weaknesses at least open the door for doctrinal misunderstanding or misinterpretation. Thus, they hold the opinion that the NIV11 would not be a wise or acceptable translation for use in WELS publications. Just as the conclusions reached by our brothers on the TEC should be respected, so the differing conclusions reached by other pastors and lay members should also be respected and recognized as an important consideration in our decision. Brothers can disagree in matters not decided by the Word of God.

We have recognized from the start that the choice of a translation ought to have an overwhelming consensus among us, so that our unity is not threatened and our confidence in our Bible is not undermined. In spite of the TEC's efforts to build such a consensus, however, it does not seem to have materialized. Some have voiced support for the NIV11, others have voiced concerns. From where I sit as synod president, I am concerned that the adoption of the NIV11 would be disturbing to a significant segment of our called workers and lay members, leaving them with deep reservations about the synod's choice and perhaps even leading them to question the synod's commitment to the Word. Instead of unity, we would suffer division—over an issue that should not be divisive. One needs to ask, "What level of consensus is sufficient for a matter of this importance? Does a two-thirds majority vote signify sufficient consensus? Does 80%? What percentage of our

synod members *are we willing to leave in doubt and uncertainty about our translation?*"

It is not insignificant that other church bodies committed to the inerrancy and inspiration of the Scriptures have found the NIV11 to be unacceptable to them. Most notably, the Evangelical Lutheran Synod (our own sister synod, united with us in doctrine and practice), has explicitly rejected the NIV11 for use in its churches. The Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, (a Lutheran synod officially committed to the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures), has expressed its opinion that the NIV11 does not meet the standards of accuracy and dependability that a confessional Lutheran church body should require. Even some non-Lutheran denominations have reached similar conclusions. The rationale other churches have used to reach those conclusions may be challenged (and the TEC has done that), but the fact remains that this is the conclusion other Christian groups have reached. If WELS adopts a translation that other Bible-believing groups have explicitly and soundly rejected, what message will we send (even unintentionally) about our commitment to the Scriptures? Some have already asked the question, "If other church bodies committed to inerrancy and inspiration have found reasons to reject the NIV11, why would WELS adopt it?"

Another concern—not immediate but down the road—is that the translators of the NIV11 have promised additional revisions in the coming years. Our selection of the NIV11 at this time would represent a clear commitment to the NIV11. It would undoubtedly be used in the new hymnal and catechism that are in early stages of development. Once we have made a commitment to NIV11 for those publications, we would be tied so closely to it that we may end up having little choice but to stay with the next version of the NIV, even if the changes prove to be more problematic than some of the changes in the NIV11.

The translation philosophy and translation choices of the NIV depend on the make-up of its translation committee. The committee that produced the NIV11 already is divided in its approach to gender neutrality, and its handling of Messianic prophecy is already a concern to some in WELS. We have been given no assurance that we will have any input in determining who will serve on that committee in the future. Nor have we been promised WELS representation on that committee. We may be able to provide our input on translation

decisions, but we are not assured that such input would be heeded. These questions need to be asked: "Do we want to be in the position of being subject to decisions made by people who may not share our convictions? Do we want to take the risk that the changes in the next revision will be even more problematic than those of the NIV11, leaving us little choice but to accept it?"

The English Standard Version (ESV) and the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB) are the two other translations under consideration. It seems clear that neither has gained significant traction or support among us.

For these reasons I believe that the TEC's Option 2 is the best way to proceed for now. In the immediate future NPH will be able to exercise its judgment in choosing translations for publishing projects, *with the understanding that wherever and whenever it can, it will continue to use the NIV84. For almost all publishing projects, it should be noted that NPH will be able to continue to use the NIV84, since "fair use" law would permit the limited use of NIV84 quotations indefinitely.* Only publications that use the biblical text as a major portion of what is printed cannot use the NIV84. Bible quotations in *Meditations, Forward in Christ*, devotional materials, topical books, etc., can continue to use the NIV84. The NIV84 can also continue to be used in congregations and schools using the current hymnal and catechism. Anything previously published by NPH using the NIV84 (the *People's Bible* series, for example) can be reprinted.

It is true that the NIV84 will no longer be available for purchase and has become more difficult to access online. People will wonder what version they should purchase for personal use or for confirmation Bibles. But we have always encouraged WELS members to have more than one Bible version in their homes for personal use and study. That would not change. And that problem can be temporary.

Option 2 has been put forward by the TEC as one of two viable choices; the committee has indicated that it would be comfortable with either of the two options it has presented. I favor the second.

***I believe that we should commit ourselves to the production of a Bible translation by confessional Lutherans.***

I am fully aware that many reasons and arguments have been put forward outlining why we should not

undertake a translation project. Real obstacles and challenges have been identified by the TFC and others. Many who believe we should not produce a translation are wise and very knowledgeable and have the best interest of the synod at heart. I highly respect their scholarship and their views. I recognize that the challenges and obstacles are real. But I must disagree with those who say that we cannot or should not undertake such a project. I believe there are reasonable answers to the concerns and objections that have been raised. I'll address the ones that I have heard.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #1**

*"WELS does not have the manpower to undertake this project." Or, "Such a project would pull our best language people out of their calls as professors at our synodical schools." Or, "WELS pastors are trained in the biblical languages, but that does not mean they are qualified to serve as Bible translators."*

It may be true that not every WELS pastor is qualified or even comfortable to produce a clear, fluent, translation from the original. But many are certainly able to work with the original languages to produce a first draft that can be refined and edited. With rightful sanctified pride and thanks to God we proclaim that, unlike most other denominations, all of our pastors are thoroughly trained to work in the biblical languages. We invest millions of dollars in our educational system in order to produce pastors who are able to go back to the original languages to answer the question, "What does God say?" We have dozens of pastors who have already, on their own, produced translations of one or more books of the Bible and have offered to be a part of any translation project. We have more than 100 pastors who participated in the TEC's comparison project. Those pastors were invited to participate because they were judged to be capable of returning to the original languages in order to determine the accuracy and dependability of existing English translations. We have experts in the languages at our schools whose expertise could be utilized on a limited basis without drawing them away from their primary full-time calling. These volunteers could all participate in the initial steps of translation work, producing a first draft working translation that can then be edited by a select translation committee for consistency and accuracy. All of this work could be done on a part-time and volunteer basis; interest in this issue has already led many to devote hours of time to it.

I do not believe that such a project would need to be carried out entirely by "experts." I believe that God has

blessed our synod with the collective expertise to produce the kind of translation that would serve us well.

Secondly, I believe that a translation project would not need to be, and should not be, limited to WELS participants. Several ELS pastors and professors have already indicated a willingness to join in a translation effort. In addition, since such a project would not involve a fellowship relationship (an example of "cooperation in externals"), Lutheran scholars and pastors from the LCMS and other theologically conservative Lutheran bodies could be invited to participate. Even though the LCMS has chosen the ESV as its translation and would not participate as a synod, the president of the LCMS has indicated that he would have no objection to LCMS individuals participating.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #2**

*"A translation project would take at least ten years to complete."*

This may have been true of some projects in the past due to the process used, but it is not necessarily the case here. Especially if the project is a revision of one or more existing base translations, such a project could be completed in a much shorter period of time. I believe that a first edition of the New Testament could be completed in as little as two years and the entire Bible in as little as five years. That timetable, would allow for the use of the completed translation in a new hymnal and catechism.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #3**

*"The cost of such a project would be too high." Or, "The project should not draw funding away from missions and the other work of the synod."*

The high cost of previous translation projects is often cited as a reason why we should not undertake a new/revised translation. But those projects all involved the extensive use of paid full-time translators and staff, resulting in high personnel costs. If a project were to make extensive use of volunteers, costs could be minimized.

Especially with the costs contained, mission dollars would not need to be diverted. In addition, some individuals and congregations have already indicated a desire to support such a project with their own gifts. Seed money could be identified from various sources, which could be recouped when the project is completed and the sale of the books begins.



#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #4**

*"Our own translation would be perceived as sectarian."*

Every translation is produced by someone. The NIV and the ESV were produced primarily by Evangelicals. The HCSB was produced primarily by Baptists. The Revised Standard Version was produced by mainline Protestants. None of those translations is considered sectarian. Why would a translation by Lutherans be seen as any more sectarian than those? Luther's own translation is not viewed as sectarian.

A translation *would* be open to the accusation of being sectarian if its translation choices were consciously made to support or promote doctrines or terminology peculiar to the group that produces it. Our intent would be *not* to do that. Our intent would be to produce a translation that accurately and faithfully conveys the meaning of the original inspired languages. If a translation does that, it cannot by definition be sectarian.

In addition, the objection that it would be seen as a "WELS translation" would be overcome if a wider participation of Lutherans from other synods would be utilized. It should not deter us if it were seen as a "translation by confessional Lutherans."

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #5**

*"Our disagreements over translations have involved criticism over what those outside our synod have done. Doing our own translation will cause us to argue against ourselves, creating disunity and distrust."*

Our evaluation of available translations done by others often revolves around questions such as, "Is this translation faithful to the original? Are the translators fully committed to the inspiration and inerrancy of Scripture?" It's true that in our own translation project there would certainly be debate and discussion among us regarding translation choices in vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. But that is a much different kind of debate than we have had over the underlying translation philosophy and questionable agendas of others. A debate among us over style and vocabulary choices would not be divisive; in fact, it would be good and healthy. Such debate would result in a widespread study of the Word, and, in the end, would result in a better translation. *I foresee no disagreement among us regarding whether a translation we produce would be anything but clear in terms of presenting biblical doctrine and being faithful to the inspired text.*

Finally, even if all final translation choices in such a project do not meet with everyone's approval (and they won't), I believe that with a translation recognized to be faithful and dependable we can accept and adjust to specific choices in vocabulary, grammar and style that may be different from what we as individuals may have preferred. I also believe that any translation process should be an open process, with individuals given the opportunity to make suggestions prior to any final editing.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #6**

*"Since it will take years, an effort to produce a new/revised translation would not solve our immediate problem."*

This is true. It does not solve the immediate problem. But a convention decision for Option 2 would allow time for that problem to be solved with the development of a new/revised translation. Furthermore, the original problem we faced resulted from the understanding that no use of the NIV84 would be allowed after 2011. This has been shown to be inaccurate, with NPH being able to continue to use NIV84 for the vast majority of its publishing work.

In the short term, congregations and schools will still be able to use NIV84. Admittedly, NIV84 will no longer be available for purchase, but existing copies should cover most needs for five years.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #7**

*"Unless we have recognized scholars and expert linguists carrying out this project, it will not likely gain scholarly recognition." Or, "What happens if we spend all the time and effort and dollars to do this, but the end product is not of high quality?"*

Quite frankly, scholarly recognition is of little importance. What we will need to strive for is the recognition, first from those within our own fellowship and then from those outside of it, that the translation is accurate, faithful, and readable.

The quality can be assured by the process that is chosen and the people who are willing to participate in the translation process. We can also gauge our ability to produce a quality translation by beginning with several demonstration translations of a number of books of the Bible. A part of that process would be to solicit suggestions for improvement before any final version is released. While there is the possibility that a final product

would not be of the quality we require, we simply will not know that unless we undertake the effort.

#### **Objection/Obstacle/Challenge #8**

*"A new translation would be a massive undertaking."*

That is true. But a project that will be a benefit and blessing to the church for generations should not be avoided simply because it is large or challenging. (Some made the same argument against producing the *People's Bible* series, saying it was too massive a project that could never be done by WELS; they were incorrect.)

A revision of one or more existing translations would reduce the time and effort significantly. A revision would enable us to consult a wide range of existing translations to compare translation choices and to selectively use the best choices.

### **Conclusion**

By God's grace, WELS is a synod standing squarely on the Word. **Our choice of a translation should reflect and clearly confess that stance.**

**We desire a translation that is both faithful and clear.** Existing translations are seen by many to be deficient in one or both of those areas. A new/revised translation can strive to provide both.

**We should have a translation that is not subject to changes decided by others.**

**We should have a translation that frees us from the high royalty costs demanded by outside publishers.**

**We desire unity.** Choosing a translation for which we have not achieved consensus would be harmful to the unity of the synod and upsetting to the faith of some of our members. But a translation produced by Lutherans who are committed to the inerrancy and verbal inspiration of the Scriptures can be a vehicle for a unified acceptance of a translation.

**We have an opportunity to give a gift to the church.** Just as Luther's translation opened the Scriptures to the masses, and just as the King James Version communicated the Word to English speakers for centuries, so we have an opportunity not so much to solve an immediate problem, but to give a lasting gift to the church that will serve God's people for a generation or more.

**We can do this, with God's help. I believe for the sake of the church and the message of Scriptures, we should and must do this.** I pray that the Lord leads us to this decision and then grants the commitment, courage, and faith to carry it out.

*Soli Deo Gloria - To God alone be the glory!*