

A CBT MEMBER'S
RESPONSE TO
THE
'STATEMENT OF
CONCERN
ABOUT THE
TNIV'

by Dr. Donald H. Madvig
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CBMW has posted a “Statement of Concern about the TNIV Bible” at its sister website: www.no-tniv.com. In this statement the main objection to the TNIV is stated as follows: “We believe that any commonly accepted Bible of the church should be more faithful to the language of the original.” At issue is whether or not the New Testament of the TNIV is sufficiently faithful to the original Greek from which it has been translated.

The major emphasis in the debate is on what is called the “generic use of masculine terms.” Greek and Hebrew, like English and many other languages, frequently use masculine terms to refer to both male(s) and female(s), for example, “he” is often used when a more precise statement would require something like “he/she.”

In the past this generic use of masculine terms was more generally understood. Today, however, many women and especially younger girls do not feel included when masculine terms are used. We cannot escape the fact that living languages are constantly changing. A vivid example is the use of the word “gay.” No modern translation would follow the wording of James 2:3 in the familiar King James Version where we read, “And ye have respect to him that weareth gay clothing . . .” The word “gay” has a very different meaning in contemporary usage.

In striving for accuracy the translator cannot avoid the necessity of judging whether or not masculine terms are being used in a generic sense and are intended by the author (in the case of the Bible, by the Holy Spirit) to refer to both men and women (boys and girls). For this reason most of the recent translations of the Bible into English use, at least to some extent what may be called “gender accurate” language. (One should observe that there are examples of “gender accurate” language already in the KJV, RSV, and NIV). A large part of the objections raised to the TNIV are objections to the way

the Committee on Bible Translation has attempted to make clear what they understand to be the author's intended meaning.

In revising Rev 3:20 the Committee was convinced that God intended that the masculine terms be understood generically—that is, that Jesus was inviting both men and women to receive him. To make this clear masculine terms were avoided. Now the statement that “the TNIV obscures any possible significance the inspired singular may have . . .” is not true. The words “they” and “them” are used with singular reference, a usage that can be traced back to Shakespeare, and this usage is on the increase in the contemporary world. It is heard commonly in everyday speech and is being used more and more frequently in print. The fact that in the TNIV the antecedent of “they” and “them” is the singular “anyone” leaves no doubt that these words are being used with a singular sense.

When dealing with the terms “father,” “son,” “brother” and “man,” the translator must ask whether they are being used in a generic sense—in which case “father” includes “mother,” “son” includes “daughter,” “brother” includes “sister,” and “man” includes “woman.” When this is true, surely it is no less faithful to express that inclusion in the translation. It is not correct to say that in the rendering of Heb 12:7 in the TNIV, “The reference to God as Father is lost.” The word “father(s)” has been translated “parents” three times in the larger context (12:4-11). In each instance it does not refer to God but to human father(s)/parents. In verse nine—where the reference is to God—the word “Father” stands. And if that were not enough, who can miss the notion of God as Father in the statement: “God is treating you as his children”? The pronoun “his” is clearly masculine; if God is treating you as his children, he must be acting as your Father. In what way can it be either true or fair to say, “The reference to God as Father is lost”?

Is it true that in Luke 17:3 the TNIV “inserts English words into the text whose meaning does not appear in the original languages”? Few if any of those who object to the TNIV would argue for counting words. Surely they would not insist that there be the same number of words in the translation as were found in the original. That is impossible. Any translation from one language to another includes words that do not have any specific equivalent in the original. The key words here are these: “whose meaning does not appear in the original languages.” The issue is not whether there is a word in the original for each word in the translation. What is important is whether the meaning is present in the original. Since the word “brother” is often used with a generic sense, we must ask: Did God intend this command only for men and not also for women? If women are included, then the word “sister” is a clarification and not an unwarranted insertion. It is true that the words “against you” do not appear in verse three in the original, but they are found in verse four which makes it clear that the same meaning is anticipated in verse three. No words have been added whose meaning is not present in the original. The same may be said about the word “offender.” Certainly “offender” is a way of referring to someone who sins against another.

The framers of the “Statement of Concern” must be aware of the prevalence of the generic use of masculine terms in the original languages of the Bible. Who would ever suggest that Jesus did not intend to include both men and women in the statement: “If anyone would come after me he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Mark 8:34). Now the referent of a word cannot be both masculine and generic at the same time. If the word is used generically it no longer has a strictly masculine meaning: it includes both male and female. It is amazing that a sweeping condemnation of the TNIV is still made charging that, “In hundreds of verses, the TNIV changes language with masculine meaning in the original Greek to something more generic.” If the intended meaning in Mark

8:34 is masculine and not generic, then women are not in view. Those “hundreds of verses” need to be examined one by one.

It must be clear to any serious Bible student that the term “Jews” in many contexts was not intended to refer to all Jews. Many times the term is used in contexts where everyone was a Jew. For example in John 9:22 we read: “His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jews . . .” Surely the writer expected us to understand that it was a certain group of Jews of whom the parents were afraid. The parents themselves were Jews. The TNIV is simply making a distinction where it is appropriate to do so. Similar things can be pointed out with reference to Acts 13:50 and 21:11.

Most people understand the term “saint” to refer to persons of exceptional holiness. This is the essence of two out of the three definitions given for “saint” in *The American College Dictionary*. However, concerning the use of the word in the New Testament, Newman and Nida in *A Translator's Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Romans* state, “The word ‘saints’ (from the stem ‘holy’) is not a description of the moral character of the Christians but refers to the fact that they belong to God.” This is what the TNIV is attempting to bring out with the translation “God’s people”: they are people who uniquely belong to God.

We cannot expect that everyone will agree with every decision of the CBT. Often committee members do not agree with each other. But we look for fairness on the part of our critics who, after all, are our fellow Christians. We also wish that they would exercise more care in examining passages before they pass judgment on them.

Dr. Donald H. Madvig is Vice Chairman for Committee on Bible Translation and Professor of Biblical Studies (retired) for Bethel Theological Seminary