



37 published a translation of the entire Bible in 1534, Luther and a committee of scholars continued to  
38 work on revising it throughout his lifetime and until his death in 1546. Revising a translation is,  
39 therefore, hardly a new concept.

40 A second reason can be summed up in the phrase “advances in scholarship.” A great deal of work has  
41 been done, for example, in the area of biblical linguistics and semantics (the meanings of words) since  
42 1984. Our grasp of some facets of the biblical settings has also been sharpened. The result has been an  
43 increasing precision in our understanding of some words and phrases in the Scriptures. Translators who  
44 want to be faithful to the original will naturally want to incorporate those advances in any revision of  
45 their version.

### 46 ***The WELS Translation Evaluation Committee’s Approach***

47 Shortly after Biblica (the corporation that holds the copyright on the NIV) announced in September 2009  
48 that the CBT was going to produce a major revision of the NIV, the Old Testament and New Testament  
49 professors of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary (WLS) began to assemble suggestions for emendations,  
50 based on the texts of Today’s New International Version (TNIV) and what was then the NIV. Professors  
51 Thomas Nass and Kenneth Cherney met with Dr. Douglas Moo, the chairman of the CBT, in November of  
52 that same year. They hand delivered the packet of suggestions from WLS and personally expressed  
53 some of their concerns regarding the new translation with special attention to the TNIV’s handling of  
54 messianic prophecy and what we felt was its overuse of inclusive language.

55 The next year, President Schroeder encouraged the formation of a translation evaluation committee,  
56 made up of the undersigned representatives of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Martin Luther College,  
57 the Commission on Inter-church Relations, Northwestern Publishing House, and the Conference of  
58 Presidents. At first the committee concentrated on defining its direction.

59 The first question we tackled was: should WELS produce its own translation? We came to the firm  
60 consensus that producing a WELS translation would not be feasible. Considering the size and scope of  
61 such a project—particularly in translating the Hebrew Old Testament—we felt we lacked sufficient  
62 resources to carry it out on our own. An additional problem in the eyes of some on the committee was  
63 the sense that coming up with our own WELS version might render us vulnerable to the accusation that  
64 we were some kind of sect with our own special Bible. This does not, of course, speak to the question of  
65 whether or not we could combine resources and forces with other confessional Lutherans or even other  
66 conservative church bodies to produce a new translation. The possibility of such a project was really  
67 beyond our ability to determine and hence, we felt, beyond the scope of our committee’s task.

68 The second question we dealt with was to determine if there might be other acceptable translations out  
69 there. We had no NIV 2011 to examine yet, so we decided to begin our work by looking at other  
70 options. But this immediately led to a discussion of the question: what constitutes a good translation?  
71 By what criteria should we measure it? This involved us in a great deal of study. We read Luther on the  
72 subject (a good read for anyone, we believe!). We read popular and scholarly works advocating  
73 different approaches to translation. We noted that there is a great deal of elasticity in the terminology

74 used by different schools of thought, so much so that it is difficult to sort through them all. Prof.  
75 Kenneth Cherney helped us reach consensus by producing the paper we have posted on our website.  
76 Among the criteria we settled on are these:

- 77 1. We expect a translation to conform to the presuppositions of faith. These include a firm  
78 conviction that we are dealing with God’s verbally-inspired, inerrant Word. Though speaking  
79 through many different human authors, one single divine Author addresses us in every word.  
80 The Scriptures find their center and beating heart in Jesus Christ, our Savior. The whole Bible  
81 testifies of him and in his name proclaims repentance and remission of sins.
- 82 2. We expect, with Luther, that a translation will communicate in the language of the people, using  
83 idioms and expressions that are understandable and in common, current use.
- 84 3. We expect that a translation will understand itself as a “direct quotation” of an ancient  
85 document, rather than merely supplying the “gist” of the original’s meaning in a contemporizing  
86 paraphrase.
- 87 4. We expect, with Luther, that when theologically necessary a translation will adhere closely to  
88 the exact wording of the original.
- 89 5. We expect that the translation will be aimed at native English speakers who can handle  
90 Standard American English at a late-primary school or early high school level, people who are  
91 neither professional theologians nor biblical illiterates. They can appreciate the difference  
92 between texts that don’t aim at literary beauty and those that do, and they have some  
93 appreciation for the latter.
- 94 6. We expect that the primary way in which most WELS people experience most of the Bible most  
95 of the time is by hearing it read—in the context of the public worship service. Consideration  
96 must therefore be given to a translation’s suitability for being read aloud.

97 Anyone who carefully considers the above criteria must realize that, in one sense, it is impossible to  
98 satisfy them all fully. Between some of the criteria, there is a distinct tension (e.g. #’s 2, 3, and 4). Any  
99 evaluator must recognize that “faithfulness” and “accuracy” are not one thing, but many. There are  
100 always more features in the original than are able to be retained in the translation, and some can only  
101 be retained by sacrificing others. Decisions about which aspects of a text are most important and which  
102 features are less crucial form the essence of the translator’s task. Another way of putting this is to say  
103 that no one translation can do it all. In any evaluation, we must keep our expectations from becoming  
104 too idealistic. There will be strengths as well as weaknesses in every translation. The only question is  
105 whether or not the strengths outweigh the weaknesses in such a way as to make one translation  
106 preferable to another.

107 As a committee then we were about to begin our work of evaluating other translations. Without  
108 passing judgment on the merits of other versions, for practical reasons we narrowed the list to only the  
109 likeliest candidates for acceptance among us. These were the English Standard Version (ESV), the  
110 Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB), the New American Standard Bible (NASB-1995 update), the  
111 New King James Version (NKJV), and Beck’s “An American Translation” (AAT). It was at that time that we  
112 were overtaken by the surprise publication of the NIV 2011 online in November 2010. Immediately we

113 altered course and devoted ourselves to a careful review of the revised version. Given the historical  
114 importance of the NIV to our church body, it seemed the only sensible approach.

### 115 ***Reviewing the revised NIV***

116 The prime question for us was whether or not, based on our criteria, the NIV would be at all usable. In  
117 this early phase we were primarily looking for what we called "deal breakers." In our committee  
118 parlance, these would be issues of such powerful significance that, all by themselves, they would render  
119 the new NIV unusable. We paid special attention to the questions of gender inclusive language (is it a  
120 deal breaker per se?) and messianic prophecy (because of issues we had seen in the TNIV). We also  
121 conducted a careful examination of the doctrinal passages where the respective callings of man and  
122 woman are most clearly taught. With respect to the final point we came to the conclusion that the new  
123 NIV had preserved the truth in those passages about the proper, God given relationship of men to  
124 women and women to men.

125 Upon completing this preliminary examination, we came to the tentative conclusion in December 2010  
126 that the new NIV might well be a translation our synod could use in its publications. That's not to say  
127 we had no further qualms about certain passages or that our doubts on inclusive language and  
128 messianic prophecy were completely swept away. Yet we did feel satisfied enough to take the next  
129 step. Indeed we found many areas where the new NIV had improved on TNIV, and there was evidence  
130 that the CBT had listened to at least some of our suggestions.

131 Beginning in January 2011 the committee coordinated a book by book review of all the changes in the  
132 NIV 2011, involving faculty members of WLS and MLC, NPH editors, and members of the COP. In  
133 addition, we asked for help from the faculty of Bethany Lutheran Seminary. Around forty people  
134 participated in the end. We requested the participants to keep track of each change, rating them on the  
135 following scale: significant improvement, modest improvement, no better and no worse, modest  
136 weakening, and significant weakening. We also invited them to comment on all changes they felt were  
137 significant—either as weakenings or as improvements. Reviewers used the handy comparison database  
138 found on the internet at [http://www.slowley.com/niv2011\\_comparison](http://www.slowley.com/niv2011_comparison).

139 We did not feel that the results of this study would end the debate or make the decision. We did,  
140 however, believe that, if a positive consensus emerged from it, we could proceed with further discussion  
141 and testing of the new NIV, involving parish pastors in that next phase. If on the other hand, the  
142 consensus of these men turned out to be negative, we as a committee would immediately have to  
143 rethink our way forward.

144 Before reporting on the results we should address one possible question that people may have: why did  
145 the committee devote the majority of its time to a study of the NIV in preference to considering other  
146 versions? First of all, it should be noted that we were still looking at other translations in our personal  
147 study and professional teaching responsibilities. Though our time to do so was limited, we have arrived  
148 at some preliminary evaluations which we will share later in this document. Furthermore, one of our  
149 number, Professor Thomas Nass, was able to write articles on both of the new evangelical translations

150 that have appeared in the past decade, the ESV and the HCSB. Later on, we will mention where you can  
 151 read what he has to say as well as access other study documents the committee has placed online.

152 The biggest reason for devoting considerable time and effort to an examination of the NIV is simply this.  
 153 We on the committee are deeply conscious of the possible impact on the church of any swift and ill-  
 154 considered change in a matter like this. We have been blessed by having had the NIV to use as a  
 155 translation for many years. It would not be a light decision for our church body to turn in a different  
 156 direction. We are very much concerned about the many disruptions that will occur if we abandon the  
 157 NIV and choose some different version. It's one thing to adopt a new translation for our publishing  
 158 house, as we did in the 1970's when all the possible versions could be given equal weight. They were all  
 159 equally new and equally strange to us. But it's quite another to turn away from a translation that has  
 160 served our church for over a generation and that has become familiar and beloved to so many of us.

161 ***Results and Analysis of the NIV Study***

162 After adding up all the responses, the following results were obtained:

Significant Improvement	Modest Improvement	No Better and No Worse	Modest Weakening	Significant Weakening
222	2885	3209	920	116

163 As one can see, participants felt that a large number of the changes were fairly insignificant, neither  
 164 better nor worse than the original NIV. Significant improvements outnumbered the significant  
 165 weakenings by a factor of nearly two to one, while modest improvements outnumbered modest  
 166 weakenings by a factor of three to one.

167 Such figures, however, can be misleading if one takes them as telling the whole story. In some passages  
 168 of great theological significance, a significant improvement can genuinely assist the reader in grasping  
 169 the truth of God's Word. Similarly, a significant weakening can obscure what our God would have us  
 170 know (see criterion # 4 above).

171 Among the former, we might point to Romans 3:23-24, so crucial to our understanding of justification:

NIV84	Ro 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
New NIV	Ro 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and <b>all</b> are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.

172 The addition of the little word "all" is significant, since it clarifies Paul's intended meaning: God has  
 173 declared **all** guilty sinners not guilty by his gracious, saving work in Christ Jesus.

174 Among the latter, we might point to Psalm 45:6. Here there is no difference in translation between the  
 175 NIV84 and the new NIV. The text reads the same in both, "Your throne, O God, will last forever and

176 ever.” At issue, however, is the footnote which was added to the new NIV as a kind of commentary on  
177 the verse. It reads, “Here the king is addressed as God’s representative.” This misleading commentary  
178 locks the reader into interpreting the passage as a reference to every Davidic king initially and then only  
179 ultimately perhaps to King Messiah. Most scholars among us would see this verse as a direct reference  
180 to King Messiah and as an Old Testament proclamation of his divine nature.

181 Respondents did not see such “significant weakenings” as rendering the new NIV unusable. It is fair to  
182 say, however, that while the new NIV is certainly an improvement over the TNIV in the areas of  
183 messianic prophecy and inclusive language, concerns remain. Permit us to summarize:

184 So far as its use of inclusive language is concerned, no participant in the study or member of the  
185 committee would quarrel with a judicious use of it where it clarifies the intention of the biblical writer  
186 for a contemporary reader. An obvious example would be 1 Timothy 2:4, where the new NIV replaces  
187 “men” with “people” in the sentence, “God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of  
188 the truth.” More troubling are those places where a standardized use of it (i.e. wherever the original  
189 has a vocative αδελφοι the NIV routinely translates “brothers and sisters”) seems to go contrary to what  
190 Paul meant to say. In 1 Corinthians 7:29, for example, the explicit inclusion of “sisters” seems odd since  
191 Paul immediately goes on to speak of “those who have wives.”

192 A larger issue, but a more difficult one to get a handle on, is the matter of introducing, by means of a  
193 routine use of inclusive language, a subtle cultural distortion into the text. We certainly have a right to  
194 expect that a translation will accurately reflect the culture and worldview of the original (see criterion #  
195 3 above). It’s fair to say that in the ancient near east, men were seen as representatives for their entire  
196 family, their entire tribe, and their entire people (e.g. “the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the  
197 God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob”—see Exodus 3:6). The language the Bible uses reflects that point of  
198 view. When many of these references are absorbed into a more inclusive manner of phrasing, will the  
199 reader come to the incorrect conclusion that the ancient near east was culturally very similar in this  
200 respect to 21<sup>st</sup> century America?

201 In evaluating this concern, the committee would like everyone to bear in mind that a certain amount of  
202 cultural distortion is part and parcel of any translation. After all, neither Moses nor Paul spoke English!  
203 Furthermore, a translator as we have already said has to make decisions about what features of the  
204 original he will preserve and which he must regretfully let go, since no one translation can do it all. We  
205 may disagree with the translator’s choices in this context or in that one. But we do understand that  
206 such choices have to be made. Readers also have to consider the importance of this issue relative to all  
207 the other matters that need to be weighed in evaluating a translation. So far as the committee is  
208 concerned, we remain of the opinion that the respective callings of men and women are clearly and fully  
209 taught in the new NIV in those Biblical passages that deal with the doctrine directly.

210 Equally if not more troubling is the matter of biblical prophecy. In view here specifically is the matter of  
211 single-fulfillment prophecies in which the holy writer, speaking with the Spirit of Christ, directly  
212 predicted the coming, the sufferings, and the glory of the Messiah. At issue here is the truth that the

213 Old Testament people were saved in the same way we are, by faith in the Messiah. By that we mean  
214 they were saved not simply by a generalized trust in the God who makes promises, but by a specific  
215 belief that God would send a divine Deliverer to free them from sin and death. “Abraham rejoiced at  
216 the thought of seeing my day,” Jesus says, “he saw it, and was glad” (Jn 8:56).

217 When, in Psalm 2 for example, the word “Son” is decapitalized<sup>1</sup>, or when the alternate translation  
218 “young woman” is offered for Isaiah 7:14 in a footnote, or when Psalm 45 is treated as we have  
219 discussed above, one cannot help but get the feeling that the current CBT is moving away from the  
220 views once held by the CBT that translated the NIV84.<sup>2</sup> In other words, it seems as if they are less and  
221 less satisfied with interpreting some prophecies as directly referring to Christ, preferring instead to see  
222 them as referring both to an individual in the context of the Old Testament and then ultimately to Jesus.  
223 While there can be no doubt that many prophecies “work” this way (e.g. 2 Sm 7), that’s not to say that  
224 they all do. This is certainly a matter worth considering in evaluating the new NIV. In doing so,  
225 however, we hasten to add that one can still—by holding fast to the text itself and by reading what the  
226 New Testament has to say—interpret all these passages correctly. Once again, readers will have to  
227 weigh the importance of this issue relative to all the other issues involved in evaluating a translation.

228 In concluding this section it might be helpful to consider something else that our committee has often  
229 discussed. If we are inclined to adopt the new NIV for our publications, but if we also see that in these  
230 two areas at least there are still some concerns that remain, might it not be a good idea for WELS to  
231 consider producing a study Bible based upon the new version? The committee can see many  
232 advantages in such an approach, not least of which would be the ability to overcome some of the  
233 weaknesses of the new version while also being able to build upon its strengths. Since the Missouri  
234 Synod has decided to use the ESV in its publications and has put the ESV into its new *Lutheran Study*  
235 *Bible*, we presume that we will no longer have access to an NIV study Bible with Lutheran notes  
236 published by Concordia Publishing House. Perhaps it is time for us to produce our own.

### 237 ***Meeting with Dr. Douglas Moo, CBT Chairman***

238 As an expression of our desire to be faithful in our assigned task, the Translation Evaluation Committee  
239 also met with Dr. Douglas Moo, chairman of the CBT. We wanted to get a sense from him of the CBT’s  
240 translational philosophy, how some of the decisions were made in committee, and whether further  
241 changes could be anticipated in the future. We also used the opportunity to ask questions and raise  
242 specific concerns about inclusive language and messianic prophecy.

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<sup>1</sup> To be fair, the Old Testament department of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary advised the CBT to omit all capitalizations of nouns and pronouns in the messianic prophecies. The OT department preferred leaving the interpretative choice in the hands of the reader.

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 8 as quoted by Hebrews 2:6-8 also caused concern by the way it was handled in the TNIV. In fact it was very difficult to see in the TNIV why the holy writer had cited it as a messianic reference. After expressing our concerns to the CBT, we were relieved to note that in the new NIV, there were some improvements in the way those verses were rendered.

243 In the matter of inclusive language, Moo stated that a great deal of the CBT's time during the past two  
244 years had been devoted to a discussion of the topic. He stressed that the mission of the CBT was to put  
245 God's Word in current natural English. He said that the decision to employ inclusive language was not  
246 stimulated by ideology or a theological agenda, but by a sincere desire to carry out their mission and as  
247 a reflection of their best understanding of the current state of English usage. In order to escape their  
248 own subjectivity on the matter, they made extensive use of a massive database of English usage that  
249 had been compiled and maintained by a disinterested third party. The CBT considered every verse  
250 where someone might be able to raise a question about inclusive language as it was used in translating  
251 the TNIV. Based upon the database, about a third of the changes in the TNIV were changed again.

252 Moo admitted that the committee wrestles with the topic of cultural shift as much as anything. The  
253 basic issue for the NIV translators was how to balance two desirable, yet somewhat competing  
254 outcomes. Naturally the CBT wanted the translation to reflect the realities of ancient near eastern  
255 culture. At the same time they wanted to make the Bible understandable to the contemporary reader  
256 who may not have ready access to good teaching. When it seemed particularly important to do so, they  
257 tried to use masculine language appropriate to that culture and time. At other times they used inclusive  
258 language when it seemed more important for the reader's understanding. The committee was aware  
259 that this approach might lead to inconsistencies, but they were not operating under any preconceived  
260 notion that they had to make everything perfectly consistent or uniform.

261 Regarding the understanding of messianic prophecy, Moo said that all of the members of the committee  
262 believe that the Old Testament has predictive prophecy that finds its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus Christ.  
263 He suggested that the majority of the committee follows the Walter Kaiser "line of fulfillment"  
264 approach.<sup>3</sup> In expressing his own understanding on the matter, Moo agreed that everyone is saved by  
265 faith, but defined the object of the Old Testament faith as "faith in the God who makes promises." The  
266 basis for their salvation would still be the sacrifice of Christ which applied backwards in time. Finally he  
267 commented that everyone on the CBT has to agree to a statement about the inerrancy of the Bible and  
268 must also subscribe to the ancient creeds of the church and a general Reformation statement of faith.

269 Dr. Moo was generous with his time, responding to all of our questions regarding the CBT's rationale for  
270 translating specific passages where messianic prophecy or inclusive language were at issue. While we  
271 cannot say that we always agreed with the rationale, we greatly appreciated his obvious sincerity and  
272 his willingness to share his thoughts so freely with us. Members of our committee would be hard  
273 pressed to find a reason to accuse him or the CBT of driving an insidious agenda.

274 There may be several other topics that we covered in our meeting which might be of general interest.  
275 The first has to do with whether or not the CBT intends to continue to make extensive changes in the

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Kaiser accepts the existence of direct, messianic predictions in the Old Testament. But he also emphasizes that, in many cases, one shouldn't have to choose if a particular prophecy is fulfilled in the immediate situation of the psalmist, or later in salvation history, or in Christ and the church. It can be fulfilled in all of them, even though it may be ultimately fulfilled in Christ. A prophetic passage's unity of meaning consists in the fact that from the original "seed" meaning, the core idea grew in content over time as God's promise-plan unfolded. See: Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *The Messiah in the Old Testament*, Zondervan, 1995, pp. 23-31.



276 text of the NIV. In his response, Moo made a number of points. CBT members, he said, have always  
277 desired to preserve continuity. In fact, 95 percent of the words of the current NIV are the same as  
278 before, and only one percent of the changes, in his opinion, involve matters of any real substance.

279 He also stated that members of his committee are humbled by the high calling that God has given to  
280 them in this work. They realize that they are affecting the lives of many people. “We don't want to  
281 change too quickly or too often so that we cause confusion,” he went on. Then he explained that, for  
282 any change to be made from the way the current text reads, 70-75% of the members (the percentage  
283 differs depending on the number who are present) have to agree to it. Finally he said that while the CBT  
284 will continue to work on the translation, the next revision to be published probably lies six or seven  
285 years in the future. He believes that even then, differences in wording will affect only a tiny percentage  
286 of the total words of the Bible.

287 Dr. Moo was open to receive nominations from us for WELS scholars who might serve on the CBT. He  
288 hinted that often good candidates for the committee are uncovered as scholars interact and give  
289 presentations at scholarly meetings, and he senses that WELS scholars aren't known in those circles  
290 because we are focused on training ministers for our church body. In any case, he said that the  
291 committee would welcome our suggestions for improvement. We asked him whether we might use the  
292 text of the new NIV to publish our own study Bible. He replied that he was not in a position to answer  
293 the question and suggested that we contact Biblica, the corporate holder of the copyright.

#### 294 ***Brief Comments about Some Other Versions***

295 As mentioned earlier, the committee thought it would be useful to share with you our preliminary  
296 comments regarding some of the other versions out there, specifically those that we believed might be  
297 the likeliest alternatives to the NIV. These evaluations are not intended to be the last word on the  
298 subject, but we did feel that providing our current thinking would serve as helpful background for our  
299 proposal below. We firmly believe that every translation has strengths as well as weaknesses and that  
300 all of these versions have features that recommend them to the reader. If, in our analysis, we focus a bit  
301 more on some of the weaknesses, it is only to demonstrate why we felt the version would not be the  
302 best choice for our publications.

303 ***AAT*** – *The Holy Bible—An American Translation* is primarily the work of Dr. William F. Beck, a  
304 confessional Lutheran. From the time it was first published, it has also been extensively revised, most  
305 notably by Dr. Siegbert Becker of Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, who was active to the end of his life in  
306 making revisions to it. Dr. Beck's goal in his translation was “to have God talk to the hearts of people in  
307 their languages of today and tomorrow.” To achieve it, he was committed to using the most up-to-date  
308 witnesses with regard to the text, and the most thorough archaeological, lexicographical, and  
309 grammatical evidence to translate the original languages. His translation is very understandable,  
310 avoiding long, complex sentences and choosing simpler words rather than more difficult ones. He uses  
311 contractions just as we do in everyday speech. This is a fine, doctrinally accurate translation to use for  
312 those readers for whom the language of the NIV is somewhat difficult to understand. It also has great  
313 value as a study Bible. The simple language does not, however, seem to be ideally suited for reading in

314 worship. Indeed, there are times where it edges almost over into the colloquial: “The snake was the  
315 smartest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made” (Gen 3:1). Another disadvantage is that the  
316 text is not available on the internet or in any electronic format. Finally one also has to ask the question,  
317 if we were the only church body to adopt this translation, would it make us vulnerable to the accusation  
318 that we were sectarian with our own special WELS Lutheran Bible? For a full review, go to the website  
319 of the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee and look for Professor David Kuske’s article, “An  
320 American Translation (AAT) – A Review and Evaluation.”

321 **ESV** – *The English Standard Version* is a modest revision of the Revised Standard Version of 1952 that  
322 was prepared by evangelical Christians and published in 2001. It is becoming a popular translation  
323 among evangelical Christians who prefer a literal translation and who are happy to preserve some of the  
324 language of the King James tradition. It is being used as the translation of choice in all Concordia  
325 Publishing House publications currently, and it may find a place among us as a study Bible and as the  
326 text of *The Lutheran Study Bible* published by Concordia in 2009. In a lengthy review, however, Prof.  
327 Thomas Nass gives reasons why he thinks the ESV may not be the best choice for WELS publications at  
328 this point. For one thing, the ESV would be a step backward in readability from what we are used to in  
329 the NIV, in that it does not so much have the flow of contemporary English. For the full review, go to  
330 the website of the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee and look for “Some Thoughts on the ESV and  
331 Bible Translation.”

332 **HCSB** – *The Holman Christian Standard Bible* appeared in 2004 as a new translation prepared by an  
333 international team of 100 scholars from 17 denominations, all committed to biblical inerrancy. The  
334 guiding principles of this translation make it a translation that deserves our attention. It tries to  
335 reproduce the words of the original as literally as possible, but it also desires to have readability  
336 comparable to the NIV. On the two issues where concerns have been expressed about the new NIV, the  
337 HCSB does nothing controversial. It takes a more moderate approach to gender inclusive language, and  
338 it clearly recognizes the messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. However, the HCSB does some  
339 things that would definitely take getting used to—that some would say are quirky. The divine name  
340 “Yahweh” is used about 500 times in the Old Testament, the word “Messiah” is used very often  
341 throughout the entire New Testament in place of “Christ,” and all pronouns referring to God are  
342 capitalized. For more information, look at “An Introduction to the HCSB,” available on the website of  
343 the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee.

344 **NASB** – Since its publication in 1971, *the New American Standard Bible* has been recognized as an  
345 excellent study Bible because it is the most consistently literal of the major translations. The fact that it  
346 is so literal, however, often makes its English seem wooden or stilted or awkward. In the 1970s WELS  
347 decided not to use the NASB in its publications because WELS wanted a translation that was more  
348 idiomatic English. The NASB underwent a revision in 1995 to update the language. In this revision, the  
349 pronouns “thee,” “thou,” and “thy” were removed, the conjunction “And” was dropped from the  
350 beginning of many sentences, and other modest changes were made to modernize the language.  
351 Perhaps the NASB deserves another look, but the committee senses that the concerns of the 1970s still  
352 remain. In addition, we wonder if it would be wise at the current time for WELS to move to a Bible

353 translation that does not use gender inclusive language in the Bible’s salvation passages. 1 Timothy 2:4  
354 in the NASB still says that God “desires all men to be saved.”

355 **NKJV**– *The New King James Bible*, published by Thomas Nelson in 1982, is a conservative revision of the  
356 King James Version. Those who appreciate the literary qualities of the KJV will find this translation very  
357 appealing. The translators claim to follow a translation philosophy of “complete equivalence” which  
358 aims at “preserv[ing] all of the information in the text, while presenting it in good literary form.” Such a  
359 goal is impossible for any translation to achieve, however appealing it may sound.<sup>4</sup> All the same, the  
360 NKJV is a fine, literal translation of the Bible, suitable for use as a study Bible, yet likely to sound  
361 somewhat awkward and archaic at times in public reading. Its greatest drawback is that the translators  
362 were unwilling to consider all the manuscript evidence available in their translation of the New  
363 Testament. They preferred instead to use, as the original King James did, the *Textus Receptus*  
364 (representing only the Byzantine family of manuscript evidence). They were consistent in this even to  
365 the point of including 1 John 5:7-8, the so-called *Comma Johanneum*. This clause does not appear in any  
366 Greek manuscripts until the 1500s and is universally recognized as a late insertion brought over from  
367 Latin texts.

### 368 ***Where To From Here?***

369 As we have considered all these matters, the committee has become firmer in its consensus regarding  
370 the new NIV. We believe it could be used as a translation for our synod’s publications. Before going any  
371 further, we ask all to understand what we are saying and what we are not saying in advancing such a  
372 thesis. We are not suggesting that this is the only way to go. Nor are we saying that there aren’t other  
373 good translations out there. We are certainly not suggesting that the new NIV become the “official  
374 version” of WELS. In fact WELS has never adopted an official version. Congregations and individuals are  
375 free to adopt and use such versions as most suit their needs.

376 But we do wish to advance the proposition that the new NIV could serve us adequately as a translation  
377 for our synodical publications. At the same time we are far from certain that those feelings are shared  
378 by a majority of WELS members. That is why we also believe that the thesis needs to be tested by  
379 further discussions held among a wider audience until we reach a more general agreement. Before we  
380 make some suggestions for broadening the conversation, permit us to list the main reasons why we  
381 believe the new NIV, despite its flaws, is still workable:

- 382 1. As noted above, while there are some notable weaknesses, there are also even more notable  
383 improvements. Does the good outweigh the bad? We do not advocate reading the chart above  
384 simplistically by saying, “The fact that improvements are in the majority ends all debate.” Yet  
385 we can suggest that its many improvements should be considered as one factor tipping the

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<sup>4</sup>For example, they were not able to preserve the information that Paul uses the same verb throughout in 1 Corinthians 13:8-11. For reasons of English style, the NKJV translators rendered καταργεω with four different verbs. We believe they made the right decision. We only point this out to demonstrate that the twin goals of “preserving all the information” while at the same time presenting it “in good literary form” are difficult to achieve in actual practice. Often one must choose between them. And this is just one example of the types of choices a good translator has to make.

386 scales in the new NIV's favor. We believe it is a faithful and accurate translation, for the most  
387 part, and that it is the best of all the versions for public reading in our churches.

388 2. We believe that no other current translation would be a significant improvement over the NIV,  
389 one that addresses all the NIV's weaknesses without adding its own new ones to the mix. No  
390 matter what version a person proposes, it will have both its weaknesses and its strengths. There  
391 is no perfect translation of the Bible. Above we have noted some of those strengths and  
392 weaknesses among the likeliest runners up. The same could be done for any other version that  
393 a person would nominate for consideration. When we apply the evaluative criteria we have set  
394 forth above, we believe that the NIV emerges as the best option.

395 3. Our synod is used to the NIV. To continue using it in its revised form would provide the greatest  
396 continuity and cause the fewest disruptions among us. Many of us can remember, for example,  
397 what it was like to memorize our catechism verses as children in the KJV and then teach them as  
398 pastors to our catechism classes in the NIV. We learned how easy it was to get confused and  
399 mix the two up. That would not happen if we adopted the new NIV. In fact we are of the  
400 opinion that if a church began using the new NIV in public reading tomorrow, most congregation  
401 members wouldn't even notice the change.

402 What is written above is not designed to end the discussion, but to promote it. In a way we can look at  
403 the fact that we are faced with this decision as a God-given opportunity to be engaged with important  
404 matters. What is a truly Lutheran approach to translating the Word of God? What is the essence of the  
405 Word of God—is it the outer form (the letters, the individual words) or is it the meaning conveyed by  
406 those forms? Can the two be easily distinguished? How much can we legitimately expect of any  
407 translation? How can using more than one version of the Bible help us reach a better understanding of  
408 what our God says? Since no translation is perfect, we believe that such a discussion will underscore all  
409 the more the importance and necessity for training our pastors to read the Bible in its original  
410 languages, so that they can say with confidence, "This is what the Lord says!"

411 We hope the synod in convention will encourage and promote those discussions. We understand that  
412 the convention will have a floor committee devoted to the Bible translation issue. It is not expected that  
413 the convention will make a decision on the matter, since the study and discussion is just beginning. But  
414 we would be happy if the convention would give guidance on the process and would indicate if the  
415 tentative plans of the committee look workable. All of the members of the committee plan to attend  
416 the convention, and we will be eager to discuss translation issues and to hear the thoughts of others.

417 As a committee, we would like to hold a convocation on translation to which representative pastors  
418 from all districts of the synod would be invited. We have tentatively set the date for Monday/Tuesday,  
419 November 14-15 at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary. We would also like to harness the wider reach of the  
420 internet, hosting "webinars" that would involve many more people in the discussion. In these webinars  
421 we could perhaps deal with specific topics in regard to the revised NIV and with other possible  
422 translations. We welcome other suggestions for furthering discussion among us. We see it as a helpful  
423 development that pastoral circuits and even entire districts are dedicating time to this issue. We are  
424 glad that pastors are teaching Bible classes on the subject. We are willing as committee members to

425 make presentations if invited to do so. We are confident that God will bless all these efforts and that, by  
426 his grace, we may soon arrive at consensus.

427 On one matter there can be no debate: we have to decide soon what version to use in our publications.  
428 Our Northwestern Publishing House (NPH) has been using NIV as the preferred translation since 1979,  
429 when the synod recommended its use for publication purposes. NPH will soon need to change to the  
430 translation used in our congregations and schools. The new curriculum for Sunday schools and  
431 elementary schools, for example, should use the translation used in the classroom and that students will  
432 hear in worship. With the introduction of the NIV revision in March 2011, the older version will soon be  
433 unavailable for classroom use. Zondervan will no longer print the older NIV and some editions are no  
434 longer available. The synod and NPH are in a transition phase along with many others but it is clear we  
435 have a limited amount of time to continue using the NIV 1984. Copyright issues will be an important  
436 factor in the near future.

437 For the present Northwestern will use the NIV 1984 in all publications that are already in production  
438 with the exception of the curriculum revision. That project will not include the NIV 1984 but await the  
439 consensus of the synod on a translation. Since assignments for Meditations and other publications are  
440 made well in advance, it will be too late to wait until the 2013 synod convention to give direction to  
441 NPH. We as a committee therefore wonder if a consensus could be ratified in some way prior to the  
442 2013 synod convention.

443 The translation evaluation committee is also determined to do our best to provide resources to promote  
444 good discussion. We have a website where we have posted not only this document but other articles  
445 and essays on this topic that should be of interest. The address is: [http://www.wels.net/news-  
446 events/forward-in-christ/bible-revision-new-international-version-2010](http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/bible-revision-new-international-version-2010). The same materials will be  
447 posted on the convention webpage. We try to respond to all the questions and suggestions of those  
448 who correspond with us. We do appreciate the feedback we receive. Finally, we will continue to pursue  
449 the question of whether or not we can produce our own study Bible using the new NIV as our base text.

450 We too are humbled by the responsibility we have been given. When we began none of us fully grasped  
451 the dimensions of the assignment. We understand that people are deeply concerned about this matter  
452 because they love the Word of Christ, the only Word by which we live. We are grateful for the support  
453 we have received from pastors and laypeople alike. We ask for your prayers that God would guide our  
454 synod to a good decision. We also pray that he stir up in our hearts the love of Christ so that we all  
455 continue to make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace in every  
456 discussion on this subject.

457 *Pastor John A. Braun*

458 *Professor Kenneth A Cherney Jr.*

459 *Professor Thomas P. Nass*

460 *Pastor Joel V. Petermann*

461 *Professor Paul O. Wendland*