

An Introduction to the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)

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As WELS is evaluating the revised New International Version (NIV), it is fitting that we look to see what other English Bible translations are available for our use. If we have hesitations about some of the changes in NIV2011, we should be thinking: Is there any other Bible translation that would serve our purposes better?

One major, new translation that is relatively unknown in WELS is the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB). It is the purpose of this paper to introduce WELS readers to the HCSB and to suggest that this is a translation that we should have on our radar as we look at translations other than the NIV.

The origin of the HCSB

The full HCSB made its appearance in March 2004. That's three years after the English Standard Version (ESV), which was published in 2001. To a certain extent, both of these new major translations were generated in response to the gender inclusive direction of the NIV, as evidenced in the New International Version Inclusive (NIVI) of 1997. The HCSB and ESV differ greatly in origin and nature, however. The ESV was a revision of an existing older translation, the RSV of 1952. The HCSB is a new translation, created fresh from the bottom up. HCSB promoters point out that the HCSB is the first completely new committee-produced translation of the Bible since the NIV in the 1970s.

Work on the HCSB actually began in the 1980s with Dr. Arthur Farstad, the Executive Editor of the New King James Version (NKJV) of 1982. As an independent personal project, he began translating the Bible, hoping to produce a new translation of the Bible following the "Majority Text."

In the late 1990s, the publishing arm of the Southern Baptist Convention, Broadman & Holman, was looking to acquire the rights to a Bible translation. They were disappointed with their licensing arrangements with the NIV, and they were concerned about the the gender inclusive direction of the NIV. They were not successful in acquiring the New American Standard Bible (NASB). In 1998 they signed an agreement with Dr. Farstad to complete and to publish his translation.

To complete the new translation, an international team of 100 scholars and editors was assembled, all of whom were committed to biblical inerrancy. Five months into the work, Dr. Farstad suddenly died. The head editorship position then passed to Dr. Edwin Blum, who successfully guided the project to completion. He remains the Executive Editor of the translation to this day.

Owned by the SBC?

One misgiving that some have expressed about the HCSB is that it is owned by a denomination. The rights to the HCSB belong to Holman Bible Publishers, and this publishing house is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). The other major evangelical translations like the ESV, NASB, NIV, and New Living Translation (NLT) are overseen by cross-denominational committees.

In response, HCSB officials insist that the HCSB has no intentions of being a "Baptist Bible." The original translation team had translators from 17 different denominations, and only about one-third of

the translators were members of the Southern Baptist Convention. Dr. Farstad was not a Baptist but was a member of the Brethren. Dr. Blum is a Presbyterian.

The title “Holman” also receives attention in this regard. Does the title “Holman” indicate a Baptist connection? HCSB officials point out that the title “Holman” was included because Holman Bible Publishers is the oldest Bible publishing firm in America. The original founders of the company were not Baptists. It is also suspected that the title “Holman” may eventually fall out of use, and the translation may one day be referred to simply as the CSB.

It is not altogether clear what arrangement is in place for the continuing oversight of the translation. When I visited with HCSB officials last November at the Evangelical Theological Society convention, they said they were in the process of putting a revision committee together. Interestingly, they said that they would welcome a Lutheran on the committee if there was someone interested and qualified.

This uncertainty about the future direction of the HCSB is something of a concern. One thing in favor of the NIV is that they have had a stable Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) that has been meeting annually since the 1970s. When CBT Chairman Douglas Moo was asked about the HCSB in comparison to the NIV, he said that the NIV has had the benefit of top-level scholars scrutinizing and working over the NIV for decades. There is a perception among some in the evangelical community that the overall scholarship of the NIV is a bit higher than the HCSB.

In its favor, the HCSB is readily available in print and electronic sources. According to the sales information of the Christian Booksellers Association, the HCSB was the sixth leading Bible translation in sales as of May 2011.¹ The order is as follows:

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|-------------------------------|--|
| 1 – New International Version | 4 – New Living Translation |
| 2 – King James Version | 5 – English Standard Version |
| 3 – New King James Version | 6 – Holman Christian Standard Version. |

The HCSB Study Bible also is fully available online at <http://beta.mystudybible.com/>.

Baptist doctrinal leanings?

If WELS has any serious thought of considering the HCSB, we should do a careful study of key doctrinal passages, comparing the HCSB side-by-side with the NIV. While preparing this paper, I took a quick look at key Baptism passages to see if there was any Baptist influence. Some of the passages are translated in a very straightforward, unobjectionable way. I did notice two passages where Baptist leanings are evident, one in the accompanying footnote and one in the text.

Baptism passages that are basically the same as the NIV.

Ac 2:38 – μετανοήσατε, [φησίν,] καὶ βαπτισθήτω ἕκαστος ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τῷ ὀνόματι Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ εἰς ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ὑμῶν

HCSB: Repent . . . and be baptized, each of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins,

NIV:² Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.

¹ http://www.cbaonline.org/nm/documents/BSLs/Bible_Translations.pdf. (Accessed April 16, 2011).

1 Pe 3:21 – ὁ καὶ ὑμᾶς ἀντίτυπον νῦν σώζει βάπτισμα, οὐ σαρκὸς ἀπόθεσις ρύπου ἀλλὰ συνειδήσεως ἀγαθῆς ἐπερώτημα εἰς θεόν,

HCSB: Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the pledge of a good conscience toward God)

NIV: this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a clear conscience toward God.

Baptism passages that are not as good as the NIV.

Mk 1:4 – ἐγένετο Ἰωάννης [ὁ] βαπτίζων ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ καὶ κηρύσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν.

HCSB: John came baptizing in the wilderness and preaching a baptism of repentance* for the forgiveness of sins. (* Or a baptism based on repentance)

NIV: And so John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

Ac 22:16 – ἀναστὰς βάπτισαι καὶ ἀπόλουσαι τὰς ἁμαρτίας σου ἐπικαλεσάμενος τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ.

HCSB: Get up and be baptized, and wash away your sins by calling on His name.

NIV: Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name.

I also took a quick look at key passages for the doctrine of predestination. Many passages seem to be translated in an acceptable way. However, the HCSB rendering of Ephesians 1:11-12 gave me pause.

Straightforward rendering of a predestination passage.

Ro 8:30 – οὓς δὲ προώρισεν, τούτους καὶ ἐκάλεσεν·

HCSB: And those He predestined, He also called;

NIV: And those he predestined, he also called;

Questionable?

Eph 1:11-12 – Ἐν ᾧ καὶ ἐκκληρώθημεν προορισθέντες κατὰ πρόθεσιν τοῦ τὰ πάντα ἐνεργοῦντος κατὰ τὴν βουλήν τοῦ θελήματος αὐτοῦ εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἡμᾶς εἰς ἔπαινον δόξης αὐτοῦ τοὺς προηλπικότας ἐν τῷ Χριστῷ.

HCSB: We have also received an inheritance in Him, predestined according to the purpose of the One who works out everything in agreement with the decision of His will, so that *we who had already put our hope in the Messiah* might bring praise to His glory.³

NIV: In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to put our hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory.

One other topic to watch would be the end times. Presumably a good number of influential people involved with the HCSB hold to millennialism in one form or another. I noticed that Romans 11:26 has the translation we prefer in the text. The translation favoring millennialism is in a footnote.

² All references in this paper will be to NIV2011 unless otherwise indicated.

³ I will sometimes insert italics into translations to highlight the pertinent words.

A conversion of all Jews in the end times?

Ro 11:26 – καὶ οὕτως πᾶς Ἰσραὴλ σωθήσεται,

HCSB: And in this way all* Israel will be saved, (* Or *And then all*)

NIV: and in this way* all Israel will be saved, (* Or *and so*)

Translation goals of the HCSB

It has become customary for contemporary Bible translations to state their translation philosophies using terms like formal equivalence and functional equivalence. Some talk about “word-for-word” translation versus “thought-for-thought” translation. The ESV says it is “essentially literal.” Others say that they have “dynamic equivalence.” Prof. Kenneth Cherney has pointed out that these categories can be simplistic and the categories aren’t used anymore by many translation experts.⁴

Into this potpourri of terms, the HCSB has thrown a new term: “optimal equivalence.” The HCSB describes optimal equivalence as a blend between formal equivalence and functional equivalence, with the goal of translating literally except “when clarity and readability demand an idiomatic translation.”⁵ The HCSB doesn’t want to disregard the original form too quickly. The HCSB says that “form cannot be neatly separated from meaning and should not be changed . . . unless comprehension demands it.”⁶ The HCSB summarizes its translation goals in this way:

The nearest corresponding semantic and linguistic equivalents are used to convey as much of the information and intention of the original text with as much clarity and readability as possible. This process assures the maximum transfer of both the words and thoughts contained in the original.⁷

Facetiously, one could say that these goals are nothing new. This is much the way that the ESV describes its work, and even the NIV and NLT. Everyone wants to convey as much information as possible. Many translations claim to shift away from the literal only when it is needed to render the text clearly in English.

To get a better gauge on the goals of the HCSB, one can quote the more informal comments of Dr. Blum. He has said that the goal of the HCSB is to have the accuracy of the NASB with the readability of the NIV. This summarizes it. The HCSB translators want a Bible that has a reputation for close resemblance to the original like the NASB. They also want a translation that has a reputation for clear contemporary wording like the NIV.

Features of the HCSB

Contemporary English.

HCSB promoters contend that the English of the HCSB is modern and contemporary, with 21st century speech patterns. As examples, they point to the fact that archaic words like “behold,” “shall,” and

⁴ Kenneth A. Cherney, Jr., “On Bible Translation and Choosing a Bible,” *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 108:2 (Spring 2011), 111-128. Also Stephen Pattemore, “Framing Nida: The Relevance of Translation Theory in the United Bible Societies,” in *A History of Bible Translation*, edited by Philip A. Noss (Rome: Edizioni Di Storia E Letteratura, 2007), 217-263.

⁵ *HCSB Study Bible* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2009), xli.

⁶ *HCSB Study Bible*, xli.

⁷ *HCSB Study Bible*, xli.

“upon” are not used. The HCSB also makes some use of contractions because contractions are considered to be part of modern speech.

Contractions are used.

Jnh 1:7 – וְנִפְּלָה גּוֹרְלוֹת וְנִדְעָה בְּשִׁלְמֵי הַרְעָה הַזֹּאת לָנוּ –

HCSB: “Let’s cast lots. Then we’ll know who is to blame for this trouble we’re in.

NIV: Come, let us cast lots to find out who is responsible for this calamity.

Freshness – not bound to previous translation decisions.

In a similar vein, HCSB promoters praise the HCSB for having the courage to break free from familiar renderings to try something new, if a familiar rendering can be improved. Since the HCSB is a completely new translation not based on any other, it is not bound to previous translation decisions. In some cases, there is a pleasing freshness to the HCSB. In other cases, one can debate whether or not the innovation is an improvement.

Non-traditional renderings.

Ps 1:2 – בְּתוֹרַת יְהוָה הִפְצֹו –

HCSB: his delight is in the LORD’s *instruction*,

NIV: whose delight is in the *law* of the LORD,

1 Co 4:13 – ὡς περικαθάρματα τοῦ κόσμου ἐγενήθημεν, πάντων περίψημα

HCSB: We are like the world’s garbage, like the dirt everyone scrapes off their sandals.

NIV: We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world—

A change in John 3:16.

As the parade example of a fresh rendering, HCSB promotional materials tout the change that was made in John 3:16. Here the adverb οὕτως is supposedly rendered in a more accurate way, to avoid the possible misunderstanding that HCSB promoters say is inherent in the traditional rendering.

“In this way.”

Jn 3:16 – οὕτως γὰρ ἠγάπησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν κόσμον,

HCSB: For God loved the world *in this way*: He gave His One and Only Son

NIV: For God *so* loved the world that he gave his one and only Son

Crisp, not wordy.

HCSB promoters are quick to share the total word count for the various English translations. The HCSB has tried to offer a tight, crisp translation, rather than something more expansive. It is interesting to see that even the NASB, known for its literalness, has far more total words.

<u>Version:</u>	<u>Total number of words:</u>
Hebrew and Greek	545,202
HCSB	718,943
NIV1984	726,109
ESV	757,439
NASB (1995)	775,861

Retains traditional theological terminology with “Bullet Notes” in the back.

The HCSB purposefully retains traditional theological terminology—words such as justification, sanctification, redemption, salvation, and others. To help with these terms and other unfamiliar terms, the HCSB has bullets by difficult terms in the text. In the back there is a list of 145 “Bullet Notes” where brief definitions or explanations are given for these words and phrases.

A little more traditional theological terminology than the NIV.

Ro 3:25 – ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον

HCSB: God presented Him as a *propitiation*⁸

NIV: God presented Christ as a *sacrifice of atonement*

Php 1:1 – πᾶσιν τοῖς ἁγίοις ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ τοῖς οὖσιν ἐν Φιλίπποις

HCSB: To all the *saints*⁹ in Christ Jesus who in Philippi,

NIV: To all *God’s holy people* in Christ Jesus at Philippi,

Heb 9:5 – κατασκιάζοντα τὸ ἱλαστήριον

HCSB: overshadowing the *mercy seat*.¹⁰

NIV: overshadowing the *atonement cover*.

Capitalization of pronouns referring to God.

The HCSB has decided to maintain the practice of capitalizing pronouns that refer to any person of the Trinity. Supporters say that this is another way to show respect and honor to God. Many of us grew up with this practice, and some may still prefer it. Glancing through issues of the *Northwestern Lutheran*, one can see that the practice ended in 1979 in our church body’s periodical. Ending the practice in WELS, of course, coincided with the use of the NIV, which does not capitalize the pronouns.

Recently John Braun wrote an editorial comment about the matter in *Forward in Christ*. He gave three reasons why FIC uses the lower case for divine pronouns: 1) It is “the style used most commonly by writers both inside and outside the church,” 2) it is “the style used by the most common Bible translations,” and 3) capitalizing the pronouns may make writing look out-of-date to modern readers.¹¹

⁸ The Bullet Notes at the end have this definition: “The removal of divine wrath; Jesus’ death is the means that turns God’s wrath from the sinner.”

⁹ The Bullet Notes at the end have this definition: “At the time of saving faith in Jesus, the believer is made a saint; therefore, all believers are saints.”

¹⁰ The Bullet Notes at the end have this definition: “Or *place of atonement*; it was the gold lid on the ark of the covenant that was first used in the tabernacle and later in the temple.”

¹¹ John Braun, *Forward in Christ*, 97:12 (Dec. 2010), 6.

In addition, critics of the practice point out that the original texts did not have such markers for their readers. It is difficult to be totally consistent with the practice, shown in the HCSB by the fact that the pronoun “who” is not capitalized when referring to God. And, the practice invariably involves the translator in knotty interpretive decisions in regard to messianic prophecy. Sometimes it is difficult to know if a pronoun is exclusively referring to Christ or not. We will see examples of this later.

Capitalization of pronouns referring to God.

Ge 1:26 – נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כְּדְמוּתֵנוּ

HCSB: Let *Us* make man in *Our* image, according to *Our* likeness.

NIV: Let *us* make mankind in *our* image, in *our* likeness,

Jn 2:23 – πολλοὶ ἐπίστευσαν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ θεωροῦντες αὐτοῦ τὰ σημεῖα ἃ ἐποίει·

HCSB: many trusted in *His* name when they saw the signs *He* was doing.

NIV: many people saw the signs *he* was performing and believed in *his* name.

“Who” is not capitalized.

Ps 18:3 (H 4) – מִהֲלֵךְ אֶקְרָא יְהוָה

HCSB: I called to the LORD, *who* is worthy of praise,

Beck: I called on the LORD *Who* deserves praise

More literal and not as smooth as the NIV in places.

For the most part as I have read the HCSB, my reading has moved along smoothly. The English is such that I have thought I could live with it as my main translation. However, occasionally there are passages that are more literal and less smooth than the NIV. Perhaps a reading of the entire text would uncover a good number of awkward passages. Here are a couple that I encountered in the past months.

More awkward than the NIV.

1 Co 7:37 – καὶ τοῦτο κέκρικεν ἐν τῇ ἰδίᾳ καρδίᾳ, τηρεῖν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ παρθένον,

HCSB: he who . . . has decided in his heart to keep his own virgin,

NIV: the man who . . . has made up his mind not to marry the virgin—

1 Co 12:23 – καὶ τὰ ἀσχήμονα ἡμῶν εὐσχημοσύνην περισσοτέραν ἔχει,

HCSB: and our unrepresentable parts have a better presentation.

NIV: And the parts that are unrepresentable are treated with special modesty,

Eph 1:10 – εἰς οἰκονομίαν τοῦ πληρώματος τῶν καιρῶν,

HCSB: for the administration of the days of fulfillment—

NIV: to be put into effect when the times reach their fulfillment—

1 Th 1:3 – ὑμῶν τοῦ ἔργου τῆς πίστεως καὶ τοῦ κόπου τῆς ἀγάπης καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς τῆς ἐλπίδος τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ

HCSB: your work of faith, labor of love, and endurance of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

NIV: your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Pe 2:12 – δοξάσωσιν τὸν θεὸν ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἐπισκοπῆς.
HCSB: they will . . . glorify God on the day of visitation.
NIV: they may . . . glorify God on the day he visits us.

Translation mistakes?

One shouldn't be surprised if there are a few missteps in a new translation. As has been said, the HCSB has not benefited from years of careful scrutiny and use. Perhaps it will mature and become better with time, if the oversight committee works diligently to improve it. Here is one surprise that I found in Hebrew texts that I have encountered in the past months. The HCSB translates differently than all major published translations and in a way that is not defensible grammatically or according to the context.

A mistake.

Eze 9:5 – וְלֹאֶלְהֵם אָמַר בְּאָזְנֵי
HCSB: He spoke as *I listened to the others*,
NIV: As I listened, *he said to the others*,

Gender inclusive language

In regard to gender inclusive language, it first of all can be said that the HCSB has more inclusive language than NIV1984, NASB, and NKJV. Where the HCSB does not see gender specificity in the original text, it translates in a way that includes both genders. The HCSB claims that it follows the so-called "Colorado Springs Guidelines" drafted by conservative evangelical leaders in 1997. Salvation passages like 1 Timothy 2:4, therefore, are translated with gender inclusive language.

Salvation passages are gender inclusive.

1 Ti 2:4 – ὃς πάντας ἀνθρώπους θέλει σωθῆναι
HCSB: who wants *everyone* to be saved
NIV1984: who wants *all men* to be saved
NIV2011: who wants *all people* to be saved

The HCSB does not have as much gender inclusive language as the NIV2011, however. The HCSB was created in part as a reaction against the NIVI of 1997, and it is clear in the HCSB "Introduction" that its producers were fearful of an insidious feminist agenda in the area of Bible translation. The "Introduction" says that the HCSB avoids "changes made specifically for the sake of political or social agendas."¹²

Some specific ways in which gender language is handled differently in HCSB than in NIV2011 are the following:

- The generic "he" is retained.
- Masculine words like "father" and "son" are not generally changed into generic terms like "parent" and "child."
- The vocative ἀδελφοί is translated as "brothers," and not as "brothers and sisters."

¹² HCSB Study Bible, xlii.

Using the “generic he.”

Eze 33:19 – וּבָשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִרְשָׁעוֹ

HCSB: if a wicked *person* turns from *his* wickedness

NIV1984: if a wicked *man* turns away from *his* wickedness

NIV2011: if a wicked *person* turns away from *their* wickedness

Pr 22:6 – חַנּוּךְ לְנֶעַר עַל-פִּי דַרְכּוֹ

HCSB: Teach a youth about the way *he* should go,

NIV1984: Train a child in the way *he* should go,

NIV2011: Start children off on the way *they* should go,

“Fathers” and “sons.”

Pr 17:6 – וְתַפְאֲרַת בָּנִים אֲבוֹתָם

HCSB: the pride of *sons* is their *fathers*.

NIV1984: *parents* are the pride of their *children*.

NIV2011: *parents* are the pride of their *children*.

“Brothers.”

Ac 6:3 – ἐπισκέψασθε δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἄνδρας ἐξ ὑμῶν μαρτυρουμένους ἑπτά,

HCSB: Therefore, *brothers*, select from among you seven men¹³

NIV1984: *Brothers*, choose seven men from among you

NIV2011: *Brothers and sisters*, choose seven men from among you

Skimming through Proverbs, however, it is not apparent to me that the HCSB is always consistent. There are passages where the HCSB sometimes adds the word “man” when neither **אִישׁ** nor **אָדָם** is in the text. In similar passages, it sometimes does not. Why the inconsistency? In the entire Old Testament, there are 166 occurrences of **בָּנִים** where the HCSB translates “children.” If the HCSB does this in some passages, why not in others?

All in all, one has to admit that the whole gender issue is not as simple as one might think. The NIV2011, it seems to me, claims to operate with the same overall guideline as the HCSB. When the original text has gender specificity, then there should be gender specificity in the translation. When the original text does not have gender specificity, then the translation should be gender inclusive. The problem is that different translators come to different interpretive judgments about whether or not there is gender specificity in the original that should be represented in the translation.

When Proverbs says that an **אָב** should discipline a **בֵּן**, does it mean to include a mother disciplining a child or not? Some say yes, so let’s reflect that in the translation. Others say yes, but let’s not reflect it in the translation. Others may say no. I notice that the HCSB never has the word “parent” or “parents” in the entire Old Testament. Given how common these terms are in ordinary language, does it seem unusual that they never show up in the Old Testament? Is it ever possible to translate **אָב** as

¹³ The “Bullet Notes” at the end of the HCSB have this comment: The Greek word *adelphoi* can be used as a reference to males only or to groups that include both males and females. It is the context of each usage that determines the proper meaning.

“parent?” Some modern lexicons say yes. If it is possible sometimes to translate בָּנִים as “children,” then couldn’t it be possible sometimes to translate אָבוֹת as “parents?” This entire matter is not easy, and we should not be too quick to condemn translations for what they do or don’t do.

From what I can see, the HCSB does nothing that will be considered controversial in the area of gender translation. If someone thinks that the NIV2011 has gone too far in this regard, *he* (!) may feel at home with the HCSB. But that doesn’t mean the HCSB is perfect either.

“Man” sometimes brought in, sometimes not.

Pr 14:16 – חָכָם יִרָא וְסָר מֵרָע

HCSB: A wise *man* is cautious and turns from evil,

Pr 21:20 – אוֹצֵר | נְחָמֵד וְשֶׁמֶן בְּנִוָּה חָכָם

HCSB: Precious treasure and oil are in the dwelling of a wise *person*,

Pr 11:5 – וּבְרָשָׁעַתּוֹ יִפֹּל רָשָׁע

HCSB: the wicked *person* will fall because of his wickedness.

Pr 18:3 – בָּבוֹא רָשָׁע בָּא גַם-בְּזֵוֹ

HCSB: When a wicked *man* comes,

Pr 12:23 – אָדָם עָרוּם כֹּסֶה דַּעַת

HCSB: A shrewd *person* conceals knowledge

Pr 21:16 – אָדָם תּוֹעָה מִדֶּרֶךְ הַשְּׂכָל

HCSB: The *man* who strays from the way of wisdom

בָּנִים translated as “children.”

Pr 20:7 – אֲשֶׁרֵי בְנָיו אַחֲרָיו

HCSB: his *children* who come after him will be happy.

NIV: blessed are their *children* after them.

Gender roles

The biggest concern with gender issues in our modern translations, it seems to me, should be in the area of gender roles. We need to be watching to see if translations undermine the doctrine of male headship and male leadership. In this regard, our WELS Translation Evaluation Committee has not found much in NIV2011 to criticize. The headship passages are basically the same as they were in NIV1984. The overseers of the church are clearly male in the NIV2011. The one passage that has caused some concern in the NIV2011 is 1 Timothy 2:12.

The HCSB “Introduction” warns that “some people today ignore the Bible’s teachings on distinctive roles of men and women in family and church and have an agenda to eliminate those distinctions in every arena of life.”¹⁴ From this, one can conclude that the translators of the HCSB were

¹⁴ HCSB Study Bible, xlii.

“complementarians” who affirm Biblical gender roles. Predictably with 1 Timothy 2:12, the HCSB has done nothing controversial.

“Authentein.”

1 Ti 2:12 – διδάσκειν δὲ γυναῖκι οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὐδὲ ἀυθεντεῖν ἄνδρος,

HCSB: I do not allow a woman to teach or to *have authority* over a man;

NIV1984: I do not permit a woman to teach or to *have authority* over a man;

NIV2011: I do not permit a woman to teach or to *assume authority* over a man;* (* Or *over her husband*)

Messianic prophecy

The second area in which some people are concerned about the NIV2011 is in the matter of messianic prophecy. The NIV2011 has adjusted some passages that were recognized as direct prophecies of Christ in the NIV1984 so that they now are read as typical prophecies, having a preliminary reference in history in addition to a final, ultimate fulfillment in Christ. The way that a translation shows this is by not capitalizing the reference. The NIV2011 has also added some footnotes that show their intentions.

Here again, the HCSB has done nothing controversial in the text, although they have numerous footnotes with alternate renderings. Those who are uncomfortable with the NIV2011 will probably be at home with the HCSB. Here are some examples.

Messianic prophecies considered direct references to Christ in the text of the HCSB.

Ps 2:2 – וְרוֹזְנִים נִסְדּוּ-יַחַד עַל-יְהוָה וְעַל-מְשִׁיחוֹ

HCSB: the rulers conspire together against the LORD and His *Anointed One*.* (*Or *anointed one*)

NIV1984: the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his *Anointed One*.* (*Or *his anointed one*.)

NIV2011: the rulers band together against the LORD and against his *anointed*,

Ps 2:12 – נִשְׁקוּ-בֶרֶךְ פִּן-יְאֹנָה

HCSB: Pay homage to the *Son* or He* will be angry (*Or *son, otherwise he*)

NIV1984: Kiss the *Son*, lest he be angry

NIV2011: Kiss his *son*, or he will be angry

Ps 45:6 (H7) – בְּסֵאֶךָ אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם וָעַד

HCSB: Your throne, God, is* forever and ever; (* Or *Your divine throne is, or Your throne is God's*)

NIV1984: Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever;

NIV2011: Your throne, O God,* will last for ever and ever; (* Here the king is addressed as God's representative.)

Ps 110:1 – נֹאֵם יְהוָה לִּי אֲדֹנָי

HCSB: This is the declaration of the LORD to my *Lord*:

NIV1984: The LORD says to my Lord:

NIV2011: The LORD says to my lord:* (* Or *Lord*)

It has to be admitted, however, that it is often difficult to know if a prophecy was meant to be a direct, rectilinear prophecy or a typical prophecy, and the history of interpretation is not uniform even within conservative Lutheran circles on some of these passages. When the Old Testament department of our Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary submitted suggestions in 2009 to the committee revising the NIV, they suggested, actually, that the NIV cut back its use of capital letters in passages like this. They wrote, “While we hold these verses to be direct promises of the Messiah, we believe removing all capitalizations in such settings removes interpretive translations and lets the reader wrestle with context and parallel passages. . . . It seems to us that removing caps in situations like this would also free the translators from the need to make interpretive decisions in every case.”¹⁵

Since the HCSB has decided to capitalize all pronouns referring directly to Christ, the HCSB has more interpretive dilemmas in this regard than other translations. One can sense their ambivalence in some places where they make use of footnotes or where they are not consistent in a literary unit. In some places, where many Lutherans traditionally would have capitalized the pronouns, the HCSB does not.

As with the gender issues, the matter of messianic prophecies is complex. No translation is going to make everyone happy. We need to have realistic expectations of English translations, and to recognize that careful instruction will be needed in connection with messianic prophecies, no matter what translation we use.

Tough decisions for the HCSB.

Ps 16:10 (H 7b) – כִּי לֹא־תַעֲזֹב נַפְשִׁי לְשֹׂאֵל לֹא־תִתֶּן חַסִּידְךָ לְרֵאוֹת שְׁחַת

HCSB: For You will not abandon *me* to Sheol; You will not allow Your *Faithful One* to see decay.
 Comment: The HCSB capitalizes “Faithful One” but none of the other pronouns in the same verse or in the rest of the psalm.

Ps 45:6b (H 7b) – שֶׁבֶט מִיֶּשֶׁר שֶׁבֶט מַלְכוּתְךָ

HCSB: the scepter of Your* kingdom is a scepter of justice. (* Or *your*)
 Comment: Notice the footnote.

Ps 45:7 (H 8) – מְשַׁחֲךָ אֱלֹהִים אֵלֶיךָ שֶׁמֶן שְׂשׂוֹן מִחֲבֵרֶיךָ

HCSB: God, *your* God, has anointed *you* with the oil of joy more than *your* companions.
 Comment: Though the HCSB capitalizes the pronouns in Psalm 45:6, the HCSB does not capitalize any of the other pronouns in the psalm.

Isa 49:6 – הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפְנֵנוּ עֵקֶב

HCSB: I will also make *you* a light for the nations,
 Comment: Though the HCSB capitalizes the pronouns in the Servant Songs in Isaiah 42:1-9, 50:4-10, and 52:13-53:12, the HCSB does not capitalize the pronouns in the Servant Song in Isaiah 49:1-6.

Some surprises without capitalization?

Ge 3:15 – הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפְנֵנוּ עֵקֶב

HCSB: He will strike your head, and you will strike *his* heel.
 Beck: He will crush your head, and you will bruise *His* heel.

¹⁵ “Suggestions for the Committee on Bible Translation: Old Testament,” document shared with the author, 2.

Ps 8:6 (H 7) – תַּמְשִׁילֶהוּ בְּמַעֲשֵׂי יָדָיְךָ כֹּל שֶׁתָּה תַחַת־רַגְלָיו

HCSB: You made him *lord* over the works of Your hands; You put everything under *his* feet:

Comment: The HCSB obviously takes this psalm as referring first of all to human beings.

Beck: You . . . make *Him* ruler over what Your hands have made, putting everything under *His* feet:

Ps 22:16 (H 17) – כָּאֲרִי יָדַי וְרַגְלֵי

HCSB: they pierced *my* hands and *my* feet.

Comment: None of the pronouns in Psalm 22 are capitalized.

Beck: They have dug into *My* hands and feet.

Isa 7:14 – הִנֵּה הָעַלְמָה הָרָה וְיֹלְדֶת בֶּן

HCSB: The virgin will conceive,* have a *son*, and name *him* Immanuel. (* Or *virgin is pregnant, will*)

Beck: Look, the virgin will conceive and have a *Son*, and *His* name will be Immanuel!

“Slave” and “Messiah” – Scholarly advances in the HCSB?

The HCSB “Introduction” talks about the need for a new translation of the Bible into English because of the “rapid advances in biblical research” which “provide new data for Bible translators.”¹⁶ When they talk about “rapid advances” and “new data,” it is not just that there are new discoveries like the Dead Sea Scrolls. Rather, they mean that the scholarly community often shifts the scholarly consensus on issues in light of new study.

One example of an innovation in the HCSB which promoters would classify as the result of progress in scholarship would be the introduction of the word “slave” in the New Testament for δούλος instead of “servant.” They say that “servant” is a mistranslation, because a “servant” could be a free person who could get paid and quit. They say that a δούλος rather is someone who is owned by someone else and unable to quit, so “slave” is the better English equivalent.

Of course, all decisions like this could be debated. Someone could argue that the word “slave” in America—given our country’s history with *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and the Civil War—has a more negative connotation than δούλος did in Greek. This is how it goes with translation! One word in the target language may have less content than the word in the source language; another word may have more content. The circle of meaning of a word in the source language never overlaps perfectly with a word in the target language. The translator has to make hard decisions. There are always trade-offs. To gain one feature, you lose another.

At any rate, one can expect the word “slave” in the HCSB, which will sound different to our ears in some passages.

“Slave” instead of “servant.”

Ac 2:18 – καὶ γε ἐπὶ τοὺς δούλους μου καὶ ἐπὶ τὰς δούλας μου ἐν ταῖς ἡμέραις ἐκείναις ἐκχεῶ ἀπὸ τοῦ πνεύματός μου,

HCSB: I will even pour out My Spirit on My male and female *slaves* in those days,

NIV: Even on my *servants*, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days,

¹⁶ HCSB Study Bible, xl.

Ro 1:1 – Παῦλος δοῦλος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ,
HCSB: Paul, a *slave* of Christ Jesus,
NIV: Paul, a *servant* of Christ Jesus,

2 Co 4:5 – Οὐ γὰρ ἑαυτοὺς κηρύσσομεν ἀλλὰ Ἰησοῦν Χριστὸν κύριον, ἑαυτοὺς δὲ δούλους ὑμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦν.
HCSB: For we are not proclaiming ourselves but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your *slaves* because of Jesus.
NIV: For what we preach is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your *servants* for Jesus' sake.

2 Ti 2:24 – δοῦλον δὲ κυρίου οὐ δεῖ μάχεσθαι
HCSB: The Lord's *slave* must not quarrel,
NIV: And the Lord's *servant* must not be quarrelsome

Another change in the HCSB supposedly based on an advance in scholarship is the introduction of “Messiah” as a translation for Χριστός in many passages. There has been a growing consensus that this is appropriate when the word is used in Jewish contexts to refer to the promised Israelite deliverer. When the word is used in Gentile contexts as a second name for Jesus, then “Christ” is retained. The NIV2011 also brings in “Messiah” especially in the gospels and Acts, but not nearly as often as the HCSB. Out of the 529 occurrences of Χριστός in the New Testament, the HCSB renders 112 of them as “Messiah,” including many references in the epistles.

There is nothing doctrinally wrong in this. It is a matter of judgment. However, one can't help but think of the comments of John Brug about the same shift in the TNIV: “If the New Testament writers had wanted to retain a Hebrew expression in their Greek writings, they could easily have done so, as John does in John 4:25, where he places the word ‘Messiah’ on the lips of the Samaritan woman and explains it with the word ‘Christ.’”¹⁷

One also wonders if the bouncing back and forth won't be confusing to readers. In the book of Colossians, the HCSB renders Χριστός as “Christ” 14 times and as “Messiah” 10 times. Undoubtedly, if you asked the translators why they translated “Christ” and why “Messiah” in each passage, they would give you a logical reason. However, will the average reader have any clue as to why the translation is going back and forth? And maybe the translators aren't 100% confident either. I notice that one passage in Colossians (2:20) had “Christ” in the HCSB printing of 2003, but was changed to “Messiah” in the 2009 revision.

Going back and forth between “Christ” and “Messiah.”

Col 1:1 – Παῦλος ἀπόστολος Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦ
HCSB: Paul, an apostle of *Christ* Jesus
Col 1:7 – ὅς ἐστιν πιστὸς ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν διάκονος τοῦ Χριστοῦ,
HCSB: He is a faithful servant of the *Messiah* on your behalf,

¹⁷ John F. Brug, “Review Article: The TNIV—Some Preliminary Observations, *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly*, 103:2 (Spring 2006), 140.

Col 1:24 – τῶν θλίψεων τοῦ Χριστοῦ

HCSB: *Christ's afflictions*

Col 2:11 – τῆ περιτομῇ τοῦ Χριστοῦ

HCSB: the circumcision of the *Messiah*.

Col 1:27 – ὁ πλοῦτος τῆς δόξης τοῦ μυστηρίου τούτου ἐν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν, ὃ ἐστὶν Χριστὸς ἐν ὑμῖν, ἡ ἐλπὶς τῆς δόξης

HCSB: the glorious wealth of this mystery, which is *Christ* in you, the hope of glory.

Col 4:3 – ἵνα ὁ θεὸς ἀνοίξῃ ἡμῖν θύραν τοῦ λόγου λαλῆσαι τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ Χριστοῦ,

HCSB: that God may open a door to us for the message, to speak the mystery of the *Messiah*,

Is this referring to the Israelite deliverer promised in the Old Testament?

Col 3:4 – ὅταν ὁ Χριστὸς φανερωθῇ, ἡ ζωὴ ὑμῶν, τότε καὶ ὑμεῖς σὺν αὐτῷ φανερωθήσεσθε ἐν δόξῃ.

HCSB: When the *Messiah*, who is your life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

The Tetragrammaton

The most eye-opening innovation in the HCSB, however, is that it brings in “Yahweh” as the translation of the Tetragrammaton in many passages. Out of the 6800 occurrences of יהוה in the Old Testament, the 2009 revision of the HCSB translates “Yahweh” in about 500 places. Curiously, the original HCSB completed in 2003 had “Yahweh” in only 75 places, so the translation seems to be moving to a greater inclusion of “Yahweh.”

How did the HCSB decide when to translate “Yahweh” and when “LORD”? The HCSB “Introduction” states:

The HCSB OT uses Yahweh, the personal name of God in Hebrew, when a biblical text emphasizes Yahweh as a name: “His name is Yahweh” (Ps 68:4). Yahweh is also used in places of His self-identification as in “I am Yahweh” (Is 42:8). Yahweh is used more often in the HCSB than in most Bible translations because the word LORD in English is a title of God and does not accurately convey to modern readers the emphasis on God’s personal name in the original Hebrew.¹⁸

Apparently the inclusion of “Yahweh” was not a unified decision on the part of all translators. In a private interview, General Editor Edwin Blum admitted, “The only reason Yahweh’s in there at all is that I had to fight tooth and nail; even all the Hebrew guys wanted to stick with the tradition.”¹⁹ Of course this comment makes one wonder a little about how the translation was put together, and how the oversight of the translation is being carried out.

As for the translation of יהוה into English, there have been variations before. The KJV had “JEHOVAH” in four passages as a name for God (Ex 6:3; Ps 83:18; Is 12:2; 26:4) in addition to “Jehovah” in three passages as part of a place name (Ge 22:14; Ex 17:15; Jdg 6:24). The American Standard Version of 1901 used “Jehovah” consistently in all 6800 occurrences. But the American

¹⁸ *HCSB Study Bible*, xliii.

¹⁹ <http://www.anwoth.org/2007/12/19/interview-with-dr-ed-blum-general-editor-for-the-hcsb/>. (Accessed February 2, 2011).

Standard Version (ASV) never sunk its roots deep into the American populace, and when the Revised Standard Version (RSV) was published in 1952 as a revision of the ASV, the RSV went back to “LORD.” “LORD” has been the customary English translation going back to Tyndale in 1521.

One other modern translation that uses “Yahweh” is the New Jerusalem Bible (NJB), a Roman Catholic translation published in 1985. The NJB uses “Yahweh” consistently in all occurrences. Of course, “Yahweh” has been used regularly in commentaries for decades. This shift is another example, some would say, of an advance in scholarship. We now supposedly know how God’s name was pronounced, and we no longer have scruples about saying it. So, some say that we should go ahead and use the name the way it originally was intended.

What is one to make of this? Certainly there is nothing doctrinally wrong with using “Yahweh.” I recently had a student at MLC tell me that his WELS pastor uses “Yahweh” frequently in sermons and Bible classes. However, not all the arguments are on the side of “Yahweh,” it seems to me.

First, no one is 100% sure that “Yahweh” is the correct way to pronounce the Tetragrammaton. Most people assume that an “a” vowel is likely under the *yod* because when the Tetragrammaton was abbreviated in the Old Testament, it was pronounced “yah” (יָהִי). The normal imperfect ending of a Lamed He verb is “eh”, so if the name implies “he exists” (an imperfect verb form), then maybe “Yahweh” is a good guess. But this still is a guess.

R. Laird Harris gives reasons why “Yahweh” may not be the original pronunciation.²⁰ He points out that an “eh” ending is a late form, after the introduction of vowel letters. At the time of Moses, Harris assumes that all four letters were consonants, so the original pronunciation may have been something like “*ya ho we hu.*” The Elephantine papyri write the divine name as יהוּ which probably would be pronounced either “yahu” (יָהוּ) or “yaho” (יָהוּ). Some Qumran Greek fragments transliterate the Tetragrammaton as ἰαω. At any rate, the proper pronunciation is not an open-and-shut case.

Second and most importantly, when the New Testament authors quoted the Old Testament under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, they always used κύριος (Lord) for יהוָה, just as the Septuagint had done some 200 years earlier. It seems to me that the New Testament has put its stamp of approval upon “Lord” as an equivalent for יהוָה. If it was good enough for the apostle Paul, then maybe it is good enough also for us. And if we in English want to highlight the special nature of the Tetragrammaton by putting it in all capital letters as “LORD,” it all makes good sense.

One also wonders how well the name “Yahweh” would be received by our people. When believers hear the name “the LORD,” I assume that there is a warmth and love and devotion that resonates in their hearts. Would it be the same for “Yahweh?” I suppose Yahweh enthusiasts would say that it will just take time for believers to make the same associations with this new name. But as much as a translation may want to bring in freshness, there is also something to be said on the side of continuity with previous translation when dealing with dearly held religious texts.

²⁰ R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, editors, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 1 (Chicago, Moody Press, 1981), 210-211. See also R. Laird Harris, “The Pronunciation of the Tetragram,” in *The Law and The Prophets: Old Testament Studies Prepared in Honor of Oswald Thompson Allis*, John H. Skilton, editor (Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co, 1974), 215-224.

If nothing else, one might wonder about the selective use of Yahweh. If one were to ask the translators why they used “Yahweh” in one verse and “LORD” in another, they very likely could give a logical reason. But the rationale in the mind of the translators may not be apparent to the average reader, especially when the names go back and forth, often in the same context and sometimes even in the same verse. I fear that this selective use may make the HCSB look quirky to many.

Certainly it is not a happy feature that the HCSB winds up with the New Testament quoting the Old Testament twice where the name used in the New Testament translation is different from what is on paper in the Old Testament, because “Yahweh” is not used in the New Testament. This looks awkward to anyone who wants to see a correlation between the Old Testament references and the New Testament quotations.

All in all, there is nothing wrong with using “Yahweh.” It is a matter of judgment. But one can wonder if it is the best judgment. At the very least, it would take some getting used to.

Going back and forth between “Yahweh” and “LORD.”

Ex 15:3 – יהוה איש מלחמה יהוה שמו

HCSB: The LORD is a warrior; Yahweh is His name.

2 Ki 3:11 – האין פה נביא ליהוה ונדרשה את־יהוה מאותו

HCSB: Isn't there a prophet of the LORD here? Let's inquire of Yahweh through him.

Ps 7:1 (H 2) – יהוה אלהי בך חסיתי

Ps 7:6 (H 7) – קומה יהוה באפך

HCSB: Yahweh, my God, I seek refuge in You;

HCSB: Rise up, LORD, in Your anger;

Ps 118:12 – בשם יהוה כִּי אֶמְלֵךְ

Ps 118:13 – ויהוה עזרני

HCSB: in the name of Yahweh I destroyed them.

HCSB: the LORD helped me.

The divine name is different in the New Testament quotation.

Joel 2:32 (H 3:5) – והיה כל אשר־יקרא בשם יהוה ימלט

HCSB: Then everyone who calls on the name of Yahweh will be saved.

Ac 2:21 – και ἔσται πᾶς ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.

HCSB: Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Ro 10:13 – πᾶς γὰρ ὃς ἂν ἐπικαλέσῃται τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου σωθήσεται.

HCSB: For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.

Conclusion

If a consensus should develop in WELS that we don't want to go with the new NIV, it is the opinion of this reviewer that the HCSB may be a better overall choice than the ESV or any of the more literal translations.²¹ But the HCSB has enough quirks about it that one hesitates to promote the major change it would take to go over the HCSB, unless one is thoroughly convinced that the NIV2011 is unworkable. The HCSB would be an adjustment.

One reason why the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee is recommending that WELS seriously consider the NIV2011 is because there aren't any other published translations that sweep us off our feet as perfectly ideal for the publications of WELS. Every translation has its weaknesses. If there is nothing noticeably better than the new NIV, then maybe the best course of action is to continue with the NIV and to avoid the disruption that would otherwise occur.

The main goal of this paper, however, is simply to suggest that we put the HCSB into the mix as we study English Bible translations as a synod this year.

²¹ This reviewer's opinion can be found in "Some Thoughts on the ESV and Bible Translation," available at the website of the WELS English Translation Evaluation Committee at <http://www.wels.net/news-events/forward-in-christ/bible-revision-new-international-version-2010>.