

**A Brief List of Pros and Cons
For Six English Bible Translations
From the WELS Translation Evaluation Committee
September 2011**

Introduction

The WELS Translation Evaluation Committee (TEC) has been asked to provide a brief summary of what we see as the pros and cons of the six English Bible translations that have been under consideration in WELS. We offer the following as our observations at this point. These comments are not exhaustive, and they could be improved and supplemented by other people as the discussion continues among us.

1) AAT – An American Translation (Beck – 4th edition)

Pros:

- It was prepared by a conservative Lutheran scholar.
- The language is easy to understand.
- Its copyright could be acquired by WELS.

Cons:

- It is not available in bookstores or in an electronic format.
- No one else uses it.
- Its simple, colloquial style may not be best for reading in church and for memorization.
- It has some idiosyncratic translations—the result of being a one-man translation.
- The translation is distinctively “American,” using some idioms that would sound foreign in other English-speaking countries.
- It should probably be revised, and that would be a very large project, especially for the OT.

2) ESV – English Standard Version

Pros:

- It is used by the Missouri Synod in its publications.
- Since it is built on the KJV tradition, it may be attractive to people who have liked the KJV.
- It could be useful as a study Bible because it is quite literal in its translation method.

Cons:

- The English in many places is more archaic and awkward than the NIV—its language is not the way we speak today. So it is not ideal for public reading or for private reading of Scripture.
- It has some literal renderings of biblical idioms that do not communicate well in English.
- ESV promoters have sometimes overstated the benefits of the ESV (saying that it does not have interpretation, that it translates Hebrew and Greek words consistently with the same English words, etc.).

3) HCSB – Holman Christian Standard Bible

Pros:

- It strives for the same readability as the NIV.
- It does nothing controversial with gender language or messianic prophecies.
- It is readily available online and in stores (as is the case with all these translations except AAT).

Cons:

- As a new translation, some have said that it is “immature”—it doesn’t have the benefit of years of use and scrutiny.
- It does some unconventional things, ignoring the previous history of English translating. For example, it sometimes translates “Yahweh” and it has innovations in Psalm 23 and John 3:16.
- We are not sure who is in charge of overseeing and revising the translation.

4) NASB – New American Standard Bible (1995 edition)

Pros:

- It could be useful as a study Bible because it is very literal in its translation method.

Cons:

- It was passed over in the 1970’s by WELS, mainly because its English is not idiomatic.
- Though updated in 1995, the English in many places is still awkward and unidiomatic.
- A number of salvation passages are not gender inclusive (1 Tim 2:4 – “who desires all men to be saved”).
- Its format, with each verse presented separately, is problematic—suggesting that the Bible is either all poetry or that it is to be read one verse at a time.

5) NIV – New International Version (2011 edition)

Pros:

- It is the most widely used modern English translation.
- It is generally recognized as a translation that reads smoothly and easily.
- NIV11 has many improvements over NIV84, as noted in our TEC survey.
- WELS has been comfortable with the NIV through 30+ years of use, so remaining with the NIV11 would lead to the least disruption in our church life.

Cons:

- Some people think that it is too interpretative, departing too far from the original in places.
- There are some gender inclusive changes in NIV 11 that we would not favor. Some people think that the Bible's teaching on gender roles is affected by these changes.
- Some OT messianic prophecies have changes from NIV84 that we would not favor.

6) NKJV – New King James Version

Pros:

- It will resonate with people who grew up with the KJV.

Cons:

- It regularly has archaic expressions and word order.
- It uses the *Textus Receptus* as its NT textual base, in opposition to the generally accepted practice.
- A number of salvation passages are not gender inclusive (1 Tim 2:4 – “who desires all men to be saved”).

Sentiments of the TEC about these translations

The TEC has never said that the NIV11 is the only possible choice for our WELS publications. All six of these translations were prepared by conservative Christians. From a doctrinal point of view, we feel that each of these six could be used with a high degree of confidence. At the 2011 synod convention, Pres. Wendland stated to everyone that he would not hesitate to put the NIV11, ESV, or HCSB into the hands of his children.

However, the TEC is concerned that WELS not make its decision for the wrong reason. We do not subscribe to the idea that a literal, word-for-word translation is necessarily to be preferred by Christians who hold to verbal inspiration. Luther, for example, preferred a translation that was idiomatic in the target language. We also recognize that each of these translations has its own set of weaknesses. We need to have realistic expectations about English Bible translations, and remember that there is no perfect translation.

As the TEC has made clear in its reports, we do not see that any of the alternatives to NIV11 is clearly superior to the NIV11. For that reason we have been recommending that WELS continue with NIV11 at this point. But the decision is not ours to make. This decision will be in the hands of all pastors, teachers, and lay delegates at their 2012 district conventions. So we encourage all pastors, teachers, and laypeople to become familiar with the issues and to study translations for themselves, as we continue to pray that God guide us to a good decision.