

Hearing God's Word Through a Good Translation (K. Barker)
A Series on How We Got Our Bible: Part 5

If the church is to hear God's Word with authority, accuracy, and clarity, it must use a good translation. But that raises the question: What constitutes a good translation? In my opinion, the key word is balance. A good translation will exhibit a pleasing balance:

- a) in its committee approach,
- b) in its textual basis,
- c) in its translation philosophy,
- d) in handling difficult passages, and
- e) in the availability of tools, reference works, commentaries, and other resources that are based on it.

These are the five areas I wish to address briefly, doing so primarily out of my experience as an NIV translator. (1)

A Balanced Committee Approach

In tracing the history of the New International Version (NIV), one discovers that in 1965 a joint Bible translation committee of the Christian Reformed Church and the National Association of Evangelicals appointed a 15 – person Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) to oversee the “preparation of a contemporary English translation of the Bible... as a collegiate endeavor of evangelical scholars (2).

CBT was to have broad representation denominationally and theologically within evangelicalism. Yet the aim was not to produce an “evangelical” translation but one that would accurately and clearly represent what the Bible actually says and means. The translators themselves were fully committed to the inspiration, infallibility, and divine authority of Holy Scripture as nothing less than the Word of God. So the NIV is a major, standard, committee produced translation.

What was the actual process or working method of the NIV translators?

First, **Initial Translation Teams** (involving almost 125 scholars from the major English speaking countries) translated the biblical books from the Hebrew and Aramaic texts of the Old Testament and from the Greek of the New Testament.

Second, **Intermediate Editorial Committees** evaluated those initial translations and compiled suggestions for improvement.

Third, **General Editorial Committees** evaluated the work of the two previous committee levels and made new suggestions.

Fourth, **CBT** evaluated all previous work and determined the final wording and content of the NIV.

Fifth, **English Stylists** (primarily Frank Gaebelin and Margaret Nicholson) improved the literary style of the NIV.

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Sixth, the NIV was field tested.

Seventh, CBT put the NIV in final form.

What are the strengths and advantages of such a balanced and thorough committee approach to the task of Bible translation? They include these:

1. No one person can spot all the problems in a translation. All translators have areas of strength as well as of weakness. A team of translators, however, can nicely supplement and complement each other.
2. Linguistic studies are highly specialized today. No one person can be an expert in all the diverse fields, such as Hebrew, Aramaic, Ugaritic, Akkadian, Greek Septuagint, Syriac Peshitta, Latin Vulgate, New Testament Greek, textual criticism, and English style. A committee of scholars can provide specialists in all of the above areas.
3. Ecclesiastical, theological, and linguistic provincialisms are avoided.
4. When a translation problem arises, the committee approach is conducive to finding a solution. Vigorous discussion and cross-fertilization of ideas act as a catalyst to stimulate the mind, thereby producing solutions that would never have been reached by a single individual working independently.
5. The multi-tiered process described above yields a finely honed product. At the lower editorial levels attention can be given to major problems. Once these have been solved, it is possible to concentrate on finer points.
6. The committee approach results in wider acceptance of the final product with Christianity.

So a good translation will take a balanced committee approach.

A Balanced Textual Basis

What was the textual basis of the NIV Old Testament? The question is answered in a general way in the Preface to the NIV:

For the Old Testament the standard Hebrew [and Aramaic] text, the Masoretic Text as published in the latest editions of *Biblica Hebraica*, was used throughout. The Dead Sea Scrolls contain material bearing on an earlier stage of the Hebrew text. They were consulted, as were the Samaritan Pentateuch and the ancient scribal traditions relating to textual changes. Sometimes a variant Hebrew reading in the margin of the Masoretic Text was followed instead of the text itself. Such instances, being variants with the Masoretic tradition, are not specified by footnotes. In rare cases, words in the consonantal text were divided differently from the way they appear in the Masoretic Text. Footnotes indicate this. The translators also consulted the more important early versions – the Septuagint; Symmachus and Theodotion; the Vulgate; the Syriac Peshitta; the Targums; and for the Psalms the *Juxta Hebraica* of Jerome. Readings from these versions were occasionally followed where the Masoretic Text seemed doubtful and where accepted principles of textual criticism showed that one or more of these textual witnesses appeared to provide the correct reading. Such instances are footnoted. Sometimes vowel letters and vowel signs did not, in the judgment of the translators, represent the correct vowels for the original consonantal text. Accordingly some words were read with a different set of vowels. These instances are usually not indicated by footnotes.

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Let us consider three examples that show some "accepted principles of textual criticism" in operation. All of them are selected from my commentary on Zechariah. (3)

The first principle pertains to passages where the Hebrew manuscripts and the ancient versions all agree on the reading, and this single reading yields a good sense. In such passages it may safely be assumed that the original reading has been preserved.

In Zechariah 6:11, for example, the Lord instructs the prophet: "Take the silver and gold and make a crown, and set it on the head of the high priest, Joshua son of Jehozadek."

Some interpreters argue that the original reading at the end of the verse was "Zerubbabel son of Shealtiel" instead of "Joshua son of Jehozadek."

But Eichrodt rightly considers "that the interpretation of this passage in terms of Zerubbabel, which can only be secured at the cost of hazardous conjecture, is mistaken, and that a reference to a hoped for messianic ruler after Zerubbabel's disappearance is more in accordance with the evidence." (4)

Furthermore, no Hebrew manuscripts or ancient versions have the Zerubbabel reading. Therefore, since it is a purely conjectural emendation, we reject it.

The second principle applies to passages where the Hebrew manuscripts and the ancient versions differ among themselves. In that situation one should choose either the more difficult reading or the reading that most readily explains how the others arose. It is also important to remember that a more difficult reading does not mean a meaningless and corrupt reading, for the end result must be a reasonable and worthy text. (5)

Zechariah 5:6 interprets the ephah or measuring basket (or barrel) as "the iniquity of the people throughout the land," in harmony with v. 8. But the Hebrew terms presents a text – critical problem. As it stands, the Hebrew means "their eye (i.e., their appearance)," which does not yield good sense (cf. the parallel in v. 8, where the woman in the basket is interpreted as wickedness personified).

The NIV, probably correctly, follows one Hebrew manuscript, the Septuagint, and the Syriac in reading the Hebrew terms ("their iniquity"). (The pronominal suffix refers to the people, perhaps with special reference to the godless rich.) The only significant variation between the two readings is the Hebrew letter *waw* instead of *yodh*.

Even here it should be borne in mind that in many ancient Hebrew manuscripts the only perceptible difference between the two letters is the length of the downward stroke. A long yodh and a short waw are virtually indistinguishable, so it would be easy for a scribe to miscopy. To further support the reading, "their iniquity (or perversity)," Baldwin adds:

The ephah, named by Amos in his invective on short measure given by the merchants (Am 8:5), symbolized injustice in *all the land*. The life of the community was vitiated by iniquity that infected it in every part (cf. Hg. 2:14). The meanness that prompted the making of false measures was a symptom of an underlying perversity that was at the root of perverse actions and relationships. (6)

The third textual principle relates to passages where both the Hebrew manuscripts and the ancient versions offer good and sensible readings, and a superior reading cannot be demonstrated on the basis of the above two principles. In that case, one should give priority to the Masoretic Text.

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An example of such a passage appears to be Zechariah 14:5, which reads:

“You will flee by my mountain valley, for it will extend to Azel. You will flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.”

The NIV footnote offers this alternative translation:

“My mountain valley will be blocked and will extend to Azel. It will be blocked as it was blocked because of the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah.”

This presupposes repointing the verbs וַיִּפְתַּח (from פָּתַח) and receives support from the Septuagint, the Targum, and Symmachus. The Masoretic Text, on the other hand, has וַיִּפְתַּח (from פָּתַח) and is supported by the Vulgate and the Peshitta. As I perceive it, the meaning of this reading is that the newly created east-west valley (v. 4) will afford an easy means of rapid escape from the anti-Semitic onslaught detailed in v. 2 (the Mount of Olives has always constituted a serious obstacle to such an escape to the east). Since the Masoretic Text makes good sense and there is no convincing reason to change it, it is to be preferred. (7)

What was the textual basis of the NIV New Testament? The question is answered briefly in the Preface to the NIV:

The Greek text used in translating the New Testament was an eclectic one. No other piece of ancient literature has such an abundance of manuscript witnesses as does the New Testament. Where existing manuscripts differ, the translators made their choice of readings according to accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism. Footnotes call attention to places where there was uncertainty about what the original text was. The best current printed texts of the Greek New Testament were used.

Several sentences in this summary call for further comment. First, what is meant by an “eclectic” Greek text of the New Testament? To answer that question, it is necessary to introduce the various text types or manuscript families. Most textual witnesses (Greek manuscripts and papyrus fragments, the ancient versions, and Scripture quotations by the early church fathers) can be grouped into one of three major text types according to the variant readings occurring in them:

1. The *Alexandrian text* was so named because it apparently emerged in and around Alexandria, Egypt. It is represented by the majority of the early papyri readings; by several early uncial manuscripts, including A (Sinaiticus), B (Vaticanus), C (Ephraemi Rescriptus); by the Coptic versions; and by significant Alexandrian church fathers, such as Clement and Origen.
2. The *Western text* is represented by the uncial D (Bezae), the Old Latin, the Old Syriac, and the church fathers Irenaeus, Tertullian, and Jerome. Most scholars are reluctant to follow readings that have only Western support.
3. “The *Byzantine text* is represented by the vast majority of Greek manuscripts and most of the later church fathers. This text was largely preserved in the area of the old Byzantine empire, which is now Turkey, Bulgaria, Greece, Albania, and the former Yugoslavia.” (8)

The so-called *Caesarean text* (found only in the Gospels) is now sometimes referred to as “other important witnesses.” (9)

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The "accepted principles" (see Preface to the NIV above) that go with such external manuscript evidence include:

- 1) Generally, the earlier manuscripts are preferred.
- 2) Normally, the reading supported in widely separated geographical areas is preferred.
- 3) The reading supported by the greatest number of text types is usually preferred.

In addition to the three principles just mentioned, there are others that go with internal evidence. Here the more important principle is: the reading that best explains the origin of others should be favored. This principle has several corollaries:

- 1) The shorter reading is usually preferred.
- 2) Normally, the more difficult reading is preferred.
- 3) The reading that best accords with the writer's style and vocabulary is preferred.
- 4) Generally, the reading that best fits the context and / or the writer's theology is preferred.
- 5) In parallel passages the less harmonious reading is usually preferred. Another principle is sometimes mentioned: Manuscripts are to be weighed rather than counted. For example, preference should be given to those manuscripts that have most often proved to be correct when all the other tests have been applied to them.

At the practical level, in conservative evangelical circles the debate over the best Greek text of the New Testament focuses on three main options:

- 1) Follow the Textus Receptus ("received text"), the Greek text that lies behind the KJV.
- 2) Follow the readings of the majority of manuscripts.
- 3) Follow a reasoned eclectic approach (described above in connection with external and internal evidence).

The vast majority of specialists in Greek and New Testament (including the most conservative ones) subscribe to the latter approach. To keep things in proper perspective, however, one must remember that all Greek manuscripts and papyri agree on a little over 98 percent of the New Testament Greek text. The differences, then, pertain to less than 2 percent of the total text of the New Testament. And the differences do not affect Christian doctrines. They are still intact. (10)

So a good translation will have a balanced textual basis. (11)

A Balanced Translation Philosophy

What types of Bible translations are there? What kind is the NIV? Where does it fit among all the others? Bible translators and linguists speak primarily of two major types of translations.

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The first is referred to variously as either formal or complete or literal or gloss equivalence. Here the translator pursues a word – for – word rendering as much as possible.

The New American Standard Bible (NASB) and the New King James Version (NKJV) are good examples of this approach. Fortunately it is frequently possible to translate literally and still retain contemporary English idiom and excellent literary style. Indeed, thousands of such renderings occur in the NIV, beginning with the first verse of the Bible.

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” is a straightforward translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:1, and it is also good English. So why change it?

Unfortunately it is often not possible to translate literally and retain natural, idiomatic, clear English. Consider the NASB rendering of Matthew 13:20:

“The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy.”

The NIV reads: “The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy.” Here the NASB is so woodenly literal that the result is a cumbersome, awkward, poorly constructed sentence. The NIV, on the other hand, has a natural and smooth style without sacrificing accuracy. (12)

The second major type of translation is referred to variously as either dynamic or functional or idiomatic equivalence. Here the translator attempts a thought – for – thought rendering.

The Good News Bible (GNB; also known as Today's English Version, TEV), the New Living Translation, God's Word, and the Contemporary English Version are some of the examples of this approach. Such versions seek to find the best modern cultural equivalent that will have the same effect the original message had in its ancient cultures. Obviously this approach is a much freer one.

At this point the reader may be surprised that the NIV has not been included as an illustration of either of these two major types of translations. The reason is that, in my opinion, it fits neither. After considerable personal study, comparison, and analysis, I have become totally convinced that in order to do complete justice to translations like the NIV and the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) scholars must recognize the validity of a third category: the balanced or mediating type.

It is significant that Nida seems to open the door for a mediating position between the two main translation philosophies, theories, or methods. He writes: “Between the two poles of translating (i.e. between strict formal equivalence and complete dynamic equivalence) there are a number of intervening grades, representing various acceptable standards of literary translating.” (13)

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A distinction must be made between dynamic equivalence as a translation principle and dynamic equivalence as a translation philosophy. The latter exists only when a version sets out to produce a dynamic equivalence rendering from start to finish, as the GNB did. The Foreword to the *Special Edition Good News Bible*, with features by Lion (England), indicates that “word – for – word translation does not accurately convey the force of the original, so the GNB uses instead the ‘dynamic equivalent’, the words which will have the same force and meaning today as the original text had for its first readers.” Dynamic equivalence as a translation principle, on the other hand, is used in varying degrees by all versions of the Bible. (14) This is easily illustrated by a few selected examples. (15)

A “literal” rendering of the opening part of the Hebrew text of Isaiah 40:2 would read: “Speak to the heart of Jerusalem.” Yet all English versions (including the KJV) see the need for a dynamic equivalence translation here.

The KJV and the NASB read “in the ears of Jerusalem” in Jeremiah 2:2, but the NKJV and the NIV have “in the hearing of Jerusalem.” Here the NKJV is just as “dynamic” as the NIV. That it did not have to be is clear from the NASB. Yet it wanted to communicate the meaning in a natural way to modern readers, which is precisely what the NIV also wanted to do.

In Haggai 2:16 the NASB has “grain heap,” but the KJV, NKJV, and NIV all use “heap” alone. Here the formal equivalent version, the NASB, is freer than the NIV, which is alleged by some to adhere to the dynamic equivalence method.

The KJV and NKJV read “no power at all” in John 19:11, whereas the NIV has only “no power.” Which is following the formal equivalence approach here and which is the dynamic?

What kind of translation, then, is the NIV? Where does it fit? While these and related questions have been dealt with generally in several publications and reviews, they are addressed specifically in only one published, authoritative source by NIV translators (*italics mine*):

Broadly speaking, there are several methods of translation:

The concordant one, which ranges from literalism to the comparative freedom of the King James Version and even more of the Revised Standard Version, both of which follow the syntactical structure of the Hebrew and Greek texts as far as is compatible with good English;

The paraphrastic one, in which the translator restates the gist of the text in own words; and the method of equivalence, in which the translator seeks to understand as fully as possible what the biblical writers had to say (a criterion common, of course, to the careful use of any method) and then tries to find its closest equivalent in contemporary usage.

In its more advanced form this is spoken of as dynamic equivalence, in which the translator seeks to express the meaning as the biblical writers would if they were writing in English today. All these methods have their values when responsibly used.

As for the NIV, its method is an *eclectic* one with the emphasis for the most part on a *flexible use of concordance and equivalence*, but with a *minimum of literalism, paraphrase, or outright dynamic equivalence*. In other words, the NIV stands on *middle ground* – by no means the easiest position to occupy.

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It may fairly be said that the translators were convinced that, through long patience in seeking the right words, it is possible to attain a high degree of faithfulness in putting into clear and idiomatic English what the Hebrew and Greek texts say. Whatever literary distinction the NIV has is the result of the persistence with which this course was pursued. (16)

This clearly indicates that CBT attempted to make the NIV a balanced, mediating version, one that would fall about halfway between the most literal and the most free. It is not, strictly speaking, a dynamic equivalence translation. If it were, it would read in Isaiah 65:25 "snakes will no longer be dangerous" (GNB) Instead of "dust will be the serpent's food." Or it would read in 1 Samuel 20:30 "You bastard!" (GNB) instead of "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!" Similar illustrations could be multiplied to demonstrate that the NIV is an idiomatically balanced translation.

How was such a balance achieved? By having a built in system of checks and balances. We called it the A-B-C-D's of the NIV, using those letters as an alphabetic acrostic to represent *accuracy*, *beauty*, *clarity*, and *dignity*.

We wanted to be *accurate*, that is, as faithful to the original text as possible. But it is also important to be equally faithful to the target or receptor language – English in this case. So we did not want to make the mistake – in the name of *accuracy* – of creating "translation English" that would not be beautiful and natural. *Accuracy*, then, must be balanced by beauty of language. CBT attempted to make the NIV read and flow the way any great English literature should.

At the same time we did not want to make the mistake – in the name of *beauty* – of creating lofty, flowery English that would not be *clear*. *Beauty* must be balanced by *clarity*. A favorite illustration of lack of *clarity* is the KJV rendering of Job 36:33: "The noise thereof sheweth concerning it, the cattle also concerning the vapour." In the interests of *clarity* the NIV reads: "His [God's] thunder announces the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach."

On the other hand, CBT did not want to make the mistake – in the name of *clarity* – of stooping to slang, vulgarisms, street vernacular, and unnecessarily *undignified* language. *Clarity* must be balanced by *dignity*, particularly since CBT's objective was to produce a general, all – church – use Bible. Some of the dynamic equivalence versions listed above are at times unnecessarily *undignified*.

To sum up, we wanted accuracy but not at the expense of beauty; we wanted beauty, but not at the expense of clarity; we wanted clarity, but not at the expense of dignity. We wanted all these in a nice *balance*.

So a good translation will follow a balanced translation philosophy.

A Balanced Solution to Difficulties

How should Bible translators handle difficult passages? One of the balanced ways CBT approached such problems in the NIV was to recognize viable alternative solutions. One example from the Old Testament and one from the New will have to suffice to illustrate the point.

In Micah 5:2 (NIV) the verse ends with "whose origins are from of old, from ancient times." Footnotes provide this alternative rendering: "whose goings out are from of old, from days of eternity." Why did CBT not reverse the main text and the alternative translation found in the footnotes?

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It is not because of carelessness in handling Old Testament Messianic prophecies or any other doctrines, as a few have charged. Rather, equally good and godly and spiritual scholars differ on the contextual interpretation of certain biblical passages, and this happens to be one of them.

Those who prefer the footnote alternative naturally use it to argue for the eternal existence of the Messiah.

Those who prefer the main text believe that the expression refers to the ancient "origins" of the Messiah in the line of David (as indicated in the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7) and in the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:10).

The majority of CBT felt that the context favored the main text: "*Bethlehem... of Judah*, out of you [emphasis mine] will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel" (note the stress on the origins of the future Davidic Ruler in the Davidic town of Bethlehem). So we put that rendering in the text and the other one in the footnotes as an alternative. Incidentally, those who favor the main text still believe in the eternal existence of the Messiah (and so in the eternal Son of God) and believe that His eternality is plainly taught in other passages, particularly in the New Testament.

The second example is taken from Hebrews 11:11, which the NIV translates "By faith Abraham, even though he was past age – and Sarah herself was barren – was enabled to become a father because he considered him faithful who had made the promise." The alternative in the footnote was "By faith even Sarah, who was past age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise." Which is correct?

As the footnote indicates, the meaning of the Greek text of this verse is uncertain and may indicate that it was Sarah who was enabled instead of Abraham. In the main text, the words "and Sarah herself was barren" are to be understood parenthetically (hence the dashes).

Bruce's fine commentary on Hebrews explains why CBT made Abraham the subject in the main text and Sarah in the footnote, though Bruce suggests still another way of working Sarah into the sentence. (17) He also points out that the major problem is that the Greek phrase for "to conceive seed" (KJV) simply does not mean that. Rather, it refers to the father's role in the generative process. A literal translation would be "for depositing sperm," thus more likely referring to Abraham. (18)

So a good translation will use balance in handling difficult passages. (19)

A Balanced Selection of Available Resources

If a Bible translation is a truly good one that will be widely used by the universal church, it must have a wide range of balanced works that are keyed to it and that support its text. Study tools, reference works, commentaries, and other resources will be based on it. The NIV, for example, has an unusual abundance of supporting resources. The following is only a partial and highly selective list of such works by category.

1. Study Bibles

The NIV Study Bible

The New Student Bible

International Inductive Study Bible

Disciples Study Bible

The Ryrie Study Bible

Life Application Bible

Thompson Chain-Reference Bible

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2. Concordances, Interlinears, and Trilog

NIV Exhaustive Concordance	NIV Hebrew-English Concordance	NIV Greek-English Concordance
Interlinear Hebrew-English OT	NIV Interlinear Greek-English NT	NIV Trilog OT (Hebrew-Greek NIV)

3. Commentaries

New Bible Commentary 21 st Century Edition	International Bible Commentary
Evangelical Commentary on the Bible	Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary
Bible Knowledge Commentary	Expositor's Bible Commentary
New American Commentary	New International Biblical Commentary
NIV Application Commentary	

4. Dictionaries and Encyclopedias

New International Dictionary of the Bible	Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible
New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology & Exegesis	New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology

5. Topical Bibles and Atlas

Zondervan NIV Nave's Topical Bible	Topical Analysis of the Bible
Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible	

6. The NIV on Computer

Bible Source	MacBible	Thompson Chain HyperBible
BibleMaster	CompuBible	Gramcord
Logos Bible Software	QuickVerse	WordSearch

The above works involve over a dozen different publishers. With such a wealth of supporting resources (and still more planned for the future), it is not surprising that over 30 denominations either sanction or extensively use the NIV.

So a good translation will have a wide range of balanced works available to support its text.

Conclusion

As indicated at the outset, if the church is to hear God's word with authority, accuracy, and clarity, it must use a good translation. Such a translation will exhibit a pleasing balance in its committee approach, in its textual basis, in its translation philosophy, in handling difficult passages, and in the selection of tools, reference works, commentaries, and other resources that are based on it. Among other things, we have attempted to demonstrate that the NIV is one translation that meets these criteria.

Does all this mean that the NIV is perfect? No, it does not. In fact, no translation is perfect, for they are all made by imperfect people. Nonetheless, as I have written elsewhere, "one advantage of using the NIV is that, in spite of its imperfections, most expositors will likely experience the pleasant surprise that they are devoting less time to correcting and clarifying the text than would be the case if they were using some other English Bible." (20) I added:

Yet another advantage of using the NIV is that it is in an ongoing review process. This means that although the text is basically established, not all renderings are "engraved in rock forever," to borrow Job's words (Job 19:24). We are open to achieving an even better balance in our translations.

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If the reader has a problem with our rendering of a particular verse and has a strong feeling about the matter, he or she may submit a suggestion or proposal to the IBS [International Bible Society] address [at the end of the Preface]. CBT will consider it. (21)

Silva puts it like this:

When the editor of New Horizons asked me if I would be interested in writing a response to criticism of the NIV, I hesitated briefly. After all, I was not involved in the translating of the NIV. Moreover, I think the NIV is far from perfect.

During the past few years, I have been involved in the production of an "NIV-like" translation of the Bible into Spanish. This work, which involves very close comparison of the NIV with the original, has alerted me to numerous renderings that appear unsatisfying, problematic, or even plain wrong. In other words, my own list of objections is probably much longer than that of most outspoken critics of the NIV.

So why would I then agree to write this article? Simply because my list of objections to *other* versions would be even longer [emphasis his]. This is not to say that all available English translations are bad. Quite the contrary! We are richly blessed by a wide variety of versions, almost all of which – when compared with good translations of other literature – have to be regarded as clear and accurate, but never perfect. (22)

Whether one chooses the NIV or one of the other good translations, I believe that time has come for every denomination and every church to adopt one version as its official Bible and use it for everything – pew Bible, preaching, public reading of Scripture, Sunday School, Scripture memorization, etc.

This is not to say that in the early elementary grades, and so at lower reading levels, one should not use simple, easy reading versions like the New International Reader's Version (NirV). Indeed the NirV nicely prepares the way for the translation to the NIV (on which it is based). Bastian agrees with the basic premise I have stated here:

The time has come for each congregation to center its life on one version... The plethora of Bible translations into English – approximately 70 of all or parts of the Bible in this century – may only have nourished a spirit of novelty among us, making us samplers rather than searchers.

If a church is to use the Bible systematically, it must center its whole life – preaching, teaching, family, and personal devotions – upon one major version, because repetition aids learning. Moreover, a congregation working from a Bible common to both pulpit and pew receives the message by the eye gate as well as the ear gate, providing another aid to understanding...

You may not agree, or may argue that the choice is much wider than I allow [he recommends the NIV over the RSV]. Either way, I hope you agree that the time has come for congregations to form their life around one major version until its great words fix themselves in the minds and hearts of worshipers of all ages. (23)

The most important thing is for a church to begin really hearing God's word through whatever good translation it selects. And may we all hear it in the frequent Hebrew and Greek sense of "hear": "listen, understand, and obey with an appropriate response."

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References:

1. Since I have had the privilege of working with Professor John Stek for many years on both the NIV and *The NIV Study Bible*, it is a special pleasure to contribute this chapter in his honor. In particular, I have always appreciated his excellent grasp of the whole range of biblical exegesis and biblical theology.
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4. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, tr. J.A. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) 2:343 n. 1.
5. B.K. Waltke, "The Textual Criticism of the Old Testament," in *Biblical Criticism: Historical, Literary and Textual* by R.K. Harrison et al. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 77-78. Waltke's entire article is very helpful.
6. J.G. Baldwin, *Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1972) 128.
7. For additional data on the original text of the Old Testament, see E.S. Kalland, "Establishing the Hebrew and Aramaic Text," in *The Making of the NIV*, ed. K.L. Barker (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 43-50, noting the works in the "Suggested Reading" list (49-50), particularly E.R. Brotzman, *Old Testament Textual Criticism: A Practical Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), B.K. Waltke (n. 5 above), and E. Wurthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, tr. E.F. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979).
8. D.A. Black, *New Testament, Textual Criticism: A Concise Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994) 33.
9. *Ibid.*, 63, 65.
10. For numerous examples of a reasoned eclectic approach, see K.L. Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996) 52-102.
11. For additional data on the original text of the New Testament, see R. Earle, "Establishing the Greek Text," in *The Making of the NIV* (see n. 7 above) 51-55, noting the works in the "Suggested Reading" list (55), particularly D.A. Black, *New Testament Textual Criticism* (n. 8 above); J.H. Greenlee, *Introduction to New Testament Textual Criticism*, Revised Edition (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1995); and B.M. Metzger, *The Text of the New Testament, Third, Enlarged Edition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); see also D.B. Wallace, "The Majority - Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (June 1994) 185-215; J.R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1995).
12. See H.M. Wolf, "Literal vs. Accurate," in *The Making of the NIV* (n. 7 above) 125-34.
13. E.A. Nida, *Toward a Science of Translating* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1964) 160.
14. See C. Hargreaves, *A Translator's Freedom* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
15. Several of these examples were given to me about 1990 by Dr. Marten Woudstra, former professor of Old Testament at Calvin Theological Seminary.
16. *The Story of the New International Version* (Colorado Springs: International Bible Society, 1978) 13.
17. F.F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 299-302.
18. *Ibid.*, 301-02. Morris is inclined to agree with Bruce – see L. Morris, "Hebrews," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (see n. 3 above) 12:119-20, 123 (n. on 11:11).
19. For more illustrations of a balanced approach to solving problems, see K.L. Barker, *The Accuracy of the NIV*, particularly 19-50 (containing many examples of using Hebrew grammar, syntax, semantics, exegesis, theology, textual criticism, etc., in solving translation problems).
20. *Ibid.*, 103.
21. *Ibid.*
22. M. Silva, "Reflections on the NIV," *New Horizons* (June 1995), (quoted by C. O'Brien in *Which Translation? Why We Use the New International Version of the Bible at Grace Presbyterian Church* (Jackson, Tenn.: Grace Presbyterian Church, 1997) 1.) 4.
23. D.N. Bastian, "We Have Been Bible Samplers Long Enough," *Christianity Today* (October 8, 1982) 104.