

STATEMENT BY PARTICIPANTS IN THE CONFERENCE ON GENDER-RELATED LANGUAGE IN SCRIPTURE

*Focus on the Family's Headquarters, Colorado Springs, Colorado
May 27, 1997*

Over the past two months evangelical leaders have engaged in a serious debate concerning the use of gender-inclusive language in English Bible translation. Dr. James Dobson called a meeting of concerned individuals to discuss together and seek the leading of the Holy Spirit in these matters. Those who participated in this meeting give glory to God for His grace evident among us as we worked together this day, and with hope we offer the following statement with the prayer that it will be of use to the Church for the glory of God.

All participants agree that our overarching concern in Bible translating is to preserve the sanctity of the truth of sacred Scripture by rendering the most accurate translation possible. In the interests of such accuracy, we all agree that modern language is fluid and undergoes changes in nuance that require periodic updates and revisions. We agree that Bible translations should not be influenced by illegitimate intrusions of secular culture or by political or ideological agendas. Specifically, we agree that it is inappropriate to use gender-neutral language when it diminishes accuracy in the translation of the Bible, and we therefore agree to the attached guidelines for translation of gender-related language in Scripture.

We agree there are limited times when the use of gender-neutral language enhances the accuracy of translations, but that the trend in usage of gender-inclusive language can easily become—and because of overuse, in too many cases, already has become—an instrument of distortion of the Biblical text.

We agree that many of the translation decisions made by those who produced Hodder and Stoughton's New International Version Inclusive Language Edition in the United Kingdom were not the wisest choices. Further, the statement in the Preface saying "it is often appropriate to mute the patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers through gender-inclusive language" (Preface to the NIVI, vii) was regrettable and sadly misleading.

We agree that it was also regrettable that the New International Reader's Version (NIRV), released also as The Kid's Devotional Bible, was released with a Preface which did not explicitly notify parents that gender-related changes were made in this version. We commend Zondervan for offering to refund the purchase price of any NIRV's to anyone who makes a request. We agree that families that wish to be reimbursed for the cost of The Kid's Devotional Bible (NIRV) should also be granted a refund.

Focus on the Family was distressed to learn that its own Adventures in Odyssey Bible, the International Children's Bible of Word Publishing, is also a gender-neutral translation (in the Old Testament). Focus on the Family is working with Word, Inc. and has withdrawn that edition from its distribution channels. Focus plans to reimburse parents who request a refund (see attached Focus on the Family press release). We commend Focus on the Family for its decisive and straightforward actions.

It is ironic in light of the present controversy that Zondervan's sales of inclusive language Bibles (NIRV and New Revised Standard Version) are only five percent of all their Bible sales, and in fact most inclusive Bibles are sold by other publishers: Thomas Nelson/Word (New Century Bible, International Children's Bible, Contemporary English Version, and NRSV), Tyndale House Publishers (New Living Translation), World Bible Publishers (God's Word and NRSV), and Baker Book House (NRSV). We commend the openness with which Zondervan approached this meeting, and we are encouraged by the willingness of the International Bible Society to revise the New International Reader's Version so that the revision (which will be completed later this summer) will eliminate the gender-related changes that had been made, bringing it into line with the current NIV.

This throws into stark relief our wider concern with the translation of God's Word among evangelical publishers at large and the necessity within Bible publishing for greater accountability to the Church concerning the matters here raised. The willingness of the IBS to re-examine the language of the NIRV and to move away from changes made to its text is greatly encouraging to us, and we call on the other publishers and copyright holders to issue similar public statements demonstrating similar reappraisals of their translation principles (see International Bible Society press release of May 27, 1997).

We agree that the discussions were transacted in a spirit of mutual trust and charity. Further, the policy statement issued by the IBS and the press release from Focus on the Family evoked profound gratitude and thanksgiving by all present.

With glory to God, and thanksgiving;

Ken Barker, Secretary, Committee on Bible Translation; Member, Executive Committee of Committee on Bible Translation

Timothy Bayly, Executive Director, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood; Pastor, Church of the Good Shepherd, Bloomington, IN

Joel Belz, Publisher, God's World Publications

James Dobson, President, Focus on the Family

Lars Dunberg, President, International Bible Society

Wayne Grudem, President, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood; Professor of Biblical and Systematic Theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Charles Jarvis, Executive Vice President, Focus on the Family

John Piper, Member, Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood; Senior Pastor, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Minneapolis, MN

Vern S. Poythress, Professor of New Testament Interpretation, Westminster Theological Seminary

Bruce E. Ryskamp, President and CEO, Zondervan Publishing House

R. C. Sproul, Chairman, Ligonier Ministries

Ron Youngblood, Member, Committee on Bible Translation; Professor of Old Testament, Bethel Theological Seminary West