

Ideology and Bible Translation

Part 2: Gender Language and the Nature of Scripture's Witness¹

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This is the second of two sessions discussing ideology and Bible Translation. Ideology inevitably plays a part in our translation since we always bring ourselves as well as the text to the table. But being aware of our ideological assumptions is a first step toward guarding against its *inappropriate* intrusion on the translation process.

Perhaps the most controversial issue in English Bible translation over the past two decades—at least in North America—has been the debate over the use of gender inclusive or gender accurate/neutral language. I'm certain I would not be standing before you right now if not for this contentious debate, since it is what launched my academic engagement with Bible translation. So in this session, I want to talk about some of the ideological issues driving the gender language debate and how they affect a range of translations—hopefully connecting to issues you face in your translation work.

Introduction: A Historical Frame of Reference

I will start with some background to provide a historical frame of reference.

The "Stealth Bible" Controversy

On March 29, 1997, the cover of *World* magazine ran the headlines, "The Stealth Bible: The Popular *New International Version* Bible is Quietly Going 'Gender-Neutral'." The article, written by assistant editor Susan Olasky, noted that a "gender-neutral" version of the NIV (or NIVI) had been recently published in Great Britain and a similar version would soon be introduced in North America. Olasky's description of the NIVI as a "stealth" Bible created a sensation (there was a picture of a stealth fighter on the cover). The repeated use of the explosive term "unisex" to describe the version, together with its link to creeping feminism in the church, provided all the ingredients for controversy. The actual title of the article was, "The feminist seduction of the evangelical church." Most of the article was in fact devoted not to the NIV, but to a critique of what it termed the dangerous trend toward feminism in the church.

Complaints began to pour in at the International Bible Society (IBS), which holds the NIV copyright, and Zondervan Publishing House, the NIV publisher. One man even drilled holes through several NIVs – meant to look like bullet holes – and sent these

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Bibles to the IBS.² Ironically, the NIV was now caught up in the same kind of ideological controversy that had so damaged the RSV.

Zondervan and the IBS moved rapidly for damage control, releasing press statements explaining that gender-inclusive language was being introduced only when warranted by the meaning of the original text and in line with contemporary English usage. The Greek word *anthrōpos*, for example, meant “person” and so was accurately translated that way. The Greek word *adelphoi*, in most NT contexts, meant “brothers and sisters,” and so to translate it that way was a sign of accuracy, not political correctness.

Yet public outrage grew. When the nation’s largest denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, threatened to drop the NIV from its Sunday School curriculum, the IBS backed down. On May 23, 1997 they issued a statement abandoning all plans for gender-related changes in future editions of the NIV.

A few days later, on May 27, another group met at Focus on the Family headquarters in Colorado Springs. Individuals (but not official representatives) were present from the International Bible Society, the Committee on Bible Translation for the NIV, Zondervan, the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and *World* magazine. The participants drafted a series of guidelines, which came to be known as “The Colorado Springs Guidelines.”³

This is how I became involved in the debate. When I read these guidelines, it seemed to me they were ideologically rather than linguistically motivated, and were full of linguistic fallacies. So I wrote a paper critiquing the guidelines and presented it at the annual meeting of Evangelical Theological Society.⁴ I subsequently wrote a book on gender language and engaged in a number of discussions and debates over the next several years.⁵

The TNIV and Its Opponents

Since the International Bible Society had agreed to freeze the NIV in its 1984 version, a new translation was proposed to carry forward the gender language changes that the translators felt were necessary to maintain accurate and contemporary English. This version became known as *Today’s New International*

²Doug LeBlanc, “Hands Off My NIV!” *Christianity Today*, vol. 41, no. 6 (June 16, 1997), 53.

³These guidelines were subsequently revised and published in a two-page advertisement in the October 27, 1997 issue of *Christianity Today*. The same issue included opposing articles on the debate written by Wayne Grudem and Grant Osborne: “Do Inclusive-Language Bibles Distort Scripture?” *Christianity Today*, vol. 41, no. 12 (Oct. 27, 1997), 26-39.

⁴Subsequently published as “Linguistic and Hermeneutical Fallacies in the Guidelines Established at the ‘Conference on Gender-Related Language in Scripture,’” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41/2 (June 1998) 239-262.

⁵*Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy* (InterVarsity, 1998). For subsequent developments, see my article “Current Issue in the Gender Language Debate,” pp. 115-141 in *The Challenge of Bible Translation. Essays in Honor of Ronald F. Youngblood* (eds. G. G. Scorgie, M. L. Strauss, and S. M. Voth; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003).

Version, (TNIV). Its NT was released in 2001 and the whole Bible in 2005. I was invited to join the NIV Committee on Bible Translation (CBT) about this time and did so in 2005, after the release of the TNIV.

The TNIV, as you may know, was consistently and vociferously attacked. There were entire websites devoted to its demise. This might seem odd, since there were already a dozen or so English Bible versions that used the same kind of gender-inclusive language, including the *New Jerusalem Bible* (1985), the *New Century Version* (1987), the *New American Bible* (revised 1988, 1990, 2010), the *Revised English Bible* (1989), the *New Revised Standard Version* (1990), the *Good News Translation* (revised 1992), *The Message* (1993), the *Contemporary English Version* (1995), *God's Word* (1995), and the *New Living Translation* (1996, rev. 2008).

The likely reason for this strong response was that the TNIV was a revision of the very popular NIV, which at that time held something like 35% of the English language Bible market. While the gender language of the NRSV could be ignored, since for many evangelicals it was a “liberal” translation. And since, in the eyes of some, the NLT was only a “paraphrase,” its use of gender inclusive language could be forgiven. But the NIV was “the real Bible” for millions of evangelicals. When it was accused of caving in to a feminist agenda, all hell broke loose. The title of an article in *Christianity Today* sums up the evangelical response: “Hands Off My NIV!”⁶ In short, the NIV became a victim of its own success.

Leading the attacks against the TNIV were Wayne Grudem, Vern Poythress and their colleagues at the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). The CBMW was founded in 1987 to stem the tide of what its members viewed as an unbiblical drift toward feminism in the church.

So the NIV tradition got swept up in an ideological controversy between complementarians, who promote male leadership in the church, and egalitarians, who believe in equal roles for men and women in the church. As so often, Bible translation was being impacted by an ideological struggle. Ironically, it was the impeccably “evangelical” NIV that was now in the crosshairs.

The 2011 NIV Revision

To quickly bring things up-to-date, sales of the TNIV never really got off the ground. Despite a strong marketing push, the translation never achieved more than 1% of the English Bible market. This was likely due to two factors: (1) the many attacks against it; and, (2) its relative obscurity. Most people either had never heard of the TNIV or they hated it. Many Christian bookstores refused to stock it.

In the face of little support for the TNIV and declining NIV sales, the International Bible Society (now called Biblica) and Zondervan knew that they had to change their strategy. They brought in consultants who reviewed the entire history of the debate

⁶ LeBlanc, “Hands Off My NIV!” *Christianity Today* 41.6, pp. 52-55.

and concluded that the TNIV should be discontinued and the NIV should be moderately revised to take into account the gender changes in the English language.

Not wanting to be accused of producing another “stealth” version, they widely publicized this new direction. In addition, Zondervan commissioned the Collins Dictionary group to conduct a massive study of contemporary English literature to gain empirical evidence concerning the present state of gender terminology in the English language. The CBT would use the objective findings of this study to guide decisions related to gender language.

After several years of work re-examining every gender change in the NIV, the CBT spent three weeks in June and July of 2010 discussing and voting on texts. The result was the 2011 NIV, which arrived, perhaps fortuitously, on the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version.

That is a very brief history lesson of the “gender wars” related to the NIV. I’ve written a great deal on the *linguistics* of gender language and I’m not going to repeat those arguments here. Instead, I want to probe the main ideological issues driving the debate.

The first of these is related to a theology of gender. Some evangelicals see the move toward gender-inclusive language as inextricably linked to feminism, which they view as a dangerous cultural intrusion in the church. Advocates of gender inclusive language, by contrast, argue that this is simply a matter of good translation policy. The English language has changed, and masculine generics no longer carry the same inclusive sense they once had. Gender-inclusive language represents the original author’s intention and avoids miscommunicating God’s Word.

The second ideology driving the debate relates to the nature of God’s Word and the manner in which it comes to us. Some place greater emphasis on the *preservation* of the source text, especially related to its forms. They argue that the verbal and plenary inspiration of Scripture is best protected by preserving as many of the source text features as possible. Others place greater stress on *communication*, emphasizing the need to clearly and accurately communicate God’s Word.

We will look at each of these ideologies in turn.

Theology of Gender: Patriarchy vs. Egalitarianism

For the most part, those who oppose the use of gender inclusive language for Scripture are complementarians or hierarchicalists, who argue that God has ordained men to lead in the church and the home.

Many of these consider such language to set a dangerous precedent that will contribute to the feminization of the church. Ironically, feminists and some complementarians share a common view on the role gender plays in language. Both argue that masculine generics arise from and continue to exploit the priority of the

male. The difference, of course, is that feminists view this as an evil and injustice that must be corrected, while complementarians consider it God-ordained and so essential to preserve.

Feminists have long argued that the so-called gender-neutrality of masculine generics is a myth and that all masculine language carries male connotations. For example, in the sentence, “Man is a primate,” “man” is supposed to be gender neutral, referring to humanity. But consider the sentences, “Man has two sexes; some men are female.” Or notice the incongruity in the sentence, “Man breastfeeds his young.”⁷ It is clear in these cases that male connotations are imposing themselves on supposedly generic contexts.

Many complementarians would agree that masculine generics are not truly generic. Yet for them this is a good thing, reflecting God’s intentional design. To introduce gender-inclusive language is to compromise the patriarchy that is affirmed in Scripture and built into the very structure of its language. Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem make this point with reference to the resumptive masculine pronoun “he.” They write:

“He” includes both men and women, but does so using a male example as a pictorial starting point. In a subtle way, this use brings along with it an unequal prominence to men and women. Thus feminism attacks it as “unfair.” But in doing so, feminism relies on an egalitarian standard *antagonistic to the Bible*.⁸

Passages using the resumptive pronoun “he” are not true generics, then, but “male representative” passages, where a male stands for the human race in the same way that Adam did. While feminists oppose such language because it emphasizes male priority, Poythress and Grudem claim:

...the Bible paints a different picture, a picture in which God has ordained men, not women, to serve in certain positions of leadership, first in Adam as representative of the human race, then in Christ, and now in the family and the church. *It so happens that generic “he” in English subtly resonates with this truth by suggesting a male case as the starting illustration for a general truth.*⁹

Of course others who affirm theological patriarchy, do not agree with this assessment. Well-known complementarians like D. A. Carson, Doug Moo and Craig Blomberg affirm the use of gender-inclusive language in Bible translation because this language more accurately reflects the meaning of the original Greek and

⁷ Janice Moulton (1981a) and Adele Mercier (1995) cited by Jennifer Saul (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-language/>)

⁸ Vern Poythress and Wayne Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy. Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words* (Broadman & Holman, 2000), 143. Emphasis mine.

⁹ Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral*, 145–46.

Hebrew. A masculine generic is just that, a generic.¹⁰ Its masculine gender is grammatical, not social or biological. If, in English, words like “man” and “he” no longer function well as generics for a growing percentage of the population, then more inclusive terms should be used to capture the intended inclusive sense. These scholars also tend to take a more descriptive than prescriptive approach to language. Rather than trying to mandate what kind of language ought to be used, they seek to discern where English presently is with respect to gender. This was the purpose of the Collins study conducted in preparation for the 2011 NIV.

Nevertheless, gender ideology inevitably affects translation decisions. The NIV committee has on its membership both complementarians and egalitarians. While I think we all seek to translate fairly according to the author’s intention, rather than according to a theological agenda, it’s impossible to remove yourself and your beliefs entirely from the translation process. Let me mention a few challenging examples.

Phoebe the deacon?

One of the most difficult CBT decisions related to gender that I can recall was in Romans 16:1. The 1984 NIV rendered the verse:

I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant (διάκονος) of the church in Cenchrea.

The word “servant” is a translation of διάκονος, a masculine term that could mean “servant,” “minister”, or “deacon” (= a church office). The term is translated “deacon” in Philippians 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3: 8, 10, 12, where it apparently refers to a church office. Most recent commentaries on Romans, including those written by complementarians, favor a church office.¹¹

Most of the committee was convinced this interpretation was correct. The problem, however, was the contemporary connotations of the word “deacon,” particularly in Baptist circles, where “deacon” often indicates senior leadership in the church—a position that women are not allowed to hold in many of these contexts. To translate the term as “deacon” risked alienating a very large constituency.

In the end, we rendered *diakonos* as “deacon,” but with a lengthy footnote reading,

The word deacon refers here to a Christian designated to serve with the overseers/elders of the church in a variety of ways; similarly in Phil. 1:1 and 1 Tim. 3:8, 12.

¹⁰ See D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive Language Debate. A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 110–115.

¹¹ See, for example, T. R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 787.

Though I think this was a good (and accurate) solution, there is no doubt that we had our eyes on our constituents and their ideological convictions. It would have been impossible not to.

What kind of authority? 1 Timothy 2:12

An even more potentially explosive passage is 1 Timothy 2:11–15, the passage in the New Testament most strongly asserting male leadership in the church. Entire volumes have been dedicated to this passage. 1 Timothy 2:12 NIV 1984 reads,

A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority (αὐθεντεῖν) over a man; she must be silent.

There are a number of important exegetical questions here. What does it mean to learn in quietness and “full submission”? Is this referring to women and men or to wives and their husbands? The nouns for “man/woman” (άνήρ/γυνή) can also mean “husband/wife.” The most controversial question, however, is the meaning of the verb αὐθεντεῖν. Does the verb mean to exercise of authority of any kind, or does it refer more specifically to a domineering or exploitative position? Historically, this has been a major battleground between complementarians and egalitarians. The semantic range of the verb is wide, including “to rule/reign; to control/dominate; to act independently; to be the originator of something; to murder.”¹² Is this passage about any kind of authority that a woman exercises over a man? Or is it an injunction against women or wives who dominate or abuse their husbands or male authorities?

My purpose is not to resolve this thorny issue, but to take note of the ideological issues. Most versions use the language of simple authority: “I do not permit a woman to teach or *to have authority* (αὐθεντεῖν) over a man” (cf. HCSB).

But consider the CEB, REB and the Message

CEB I don’t allow a wife to teach or *to control her husband*.
 REB I do not permit women to teach or *dictate to the men*;
 Message I don’t let women take over and *tell the men what to do*.

The CEB treats this as an exhortation against a domineering attitude in marriage, which in that cultural context would bring great shame to the household and so to the church. The REB and Message clearly have pejorative connotations of inappropriate or obtrusive control.

¹² P. H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (New International Commentary on the New Testament; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 220-21. BDAG, p. 150, gives as a definition “to assume a stance of independent authority, give orders to, dictate to.”

The NIV 2011 (following the TNIV) tried a somewhat more mediating solution, using the term “assume”:

NIV 2011 I do not permit a woman to teach or *to assume authority* over a man;

This decision was made before I joined the CBT, but I believe it was meant to be intentionally ambiguous, allowing for the interpretation either of simple authority or of the usurping of another’s authority. In other words, they had an eye on both constituencies, egalitarian and complementarian. To a certain extent, every translator is looking over their shoulder to see who is watching.

Brothers and Sisters (adelphoi)

Another example where gender ideology appears to be playing a role is in the translation of the Greek *adelphoi* in recent English versions. As noted earlier, while the term has been traditionally rendered “brethren” or “brothers,” in many NT contexts it clearly refers to both men and women, and so is appropriately rendered, “brothers and sisters” or “siblings.” Beginning with the NRSV in 1990, many versions adopted the rendering “brothers and sisters,” no doubt because “brothers” clearly sounds exclusive to most English ears.¹³

The English Standard Version, although produced by scholars generally averse to gender inclusive language, also recognizes the inclusive meaning of *adelphoi*.¹⁴ A lengthy footnote appears at the first occurrence of the word in each NT book in which it appears:

Or *brothers and sisters*. The plural Greek word *adelphoi* (translated “brothers”) refers to siblings in a family. In New Testament usage, depending on the context, *adelphoi* may refer either to men or to both men and women who are siblings (brothers and sisters) in God’s family, the church

Unlike these other versions, however, the ESV keeps “brothers” in the text, and retains “brothers and sisters” in the footnote. This is surprising, since the meaning in these contexts is clearly “brothers and sisters.” I want to be cautious before assuming motivations here, but it seems to me the likely reason is ideological. The ESV’s core constituents would be greatly offended by the rendering “brothers and sisters,” since it appears to be a condescension to feminism. In their book on gender language, Poythress and Grudem make this point,

¹³ Ironically, these versions sometimes support this rendering *with faulty linguistics*. For example, whenever *adelphoi* is translated as “brothers and sisters,” a footnote appears in the NRSV that says *Gk Brothers*. This is of course wrong on two counts. First, the Greek word is not “brothers”; it is *adelphoi*. Second, *adelphoi* doesn’t mean “brothers”; it means “brothers and sisters” or fellow Christians. Similar notes appear in the NLT and NET.

¹⁴ For the background to this acknowledgement, see Strauss, *Distorting Scripture*, 150–51.

To people familiar with the previous history of using “brothers/brethren” in the Bible, a new usage like “brothers and sisters” stands out. It is conspicuous because people remember what earlier versions said. It thus conveys to some readers a pro-feminist overtone.¹⁵

Here the concern that a “pro-feminist” agenda might be assumed by conservative readers appears to be trumping the best translation in context.

Women Disciples?

A similar concession to ideology may occur in 2 Timothy 2:2, a key Pauline text concerning discipleship. The ESV reads,

...and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men (*anthrōpoi*) who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Tim 2:2 ESV)

The plural *anthrōpoi* usually means “people” not “men,” and the ESV consistently translates it as “people” throughout the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 2:1, 5; 4:10; 5:24; 6:5, 9, 16; 2 Tim 2:2; 3:2, 8, 13; Titus 1:14; 2:11; 3:2, 8).¹⁶ Why is it here translated “men”? Presumably, because in this context there is reference to teaching and to leadership training, which for complementarians are the domain of men (at least in a mixed male and female context). I am not suggesting that the translation “men” is necessarily wrong. The translators no doubt believed that this is precisely what Paul intended. But it is a theology of women and men that is guiding this conclusion.

Though a theology of gender relationships has played a significant role in the gender language debate, another equally important ideological concern must be noted. This relates to the competing tensions between *preserving the source text features and communicating to the receptor audience*.

Preservation or Communication & the Nature of Divine Revelation

A significant shift in the gender language debate took place around the year 2000. Prior to that time, most of the criticism had centered on claims of political correctness and the perceived threat of feminism. At that time, however, the debate shifted to the issue of *translation philosophy*—the age-old *form vs. function* debate.

This shift in emphasis appears to have been motivated by two factors. First, supporters of gender inclusive language had been emphasizing the goal of representing the *meaning* of the original text, not just its form. The Greek word *anthrōpos*, though masculine in form, in context *meant* “person.” Similarly, *adelphoi* really *did* mean “brothers and sisters,” not “brothers” or “brethren.”

¹⁵ Poythress and Grudem, *Gender-Neutral Controversy*, 267.

¹⁶ The only exceptions are here, in 1 Tim. 2:4, where it is translated as “men” to parallel “the man Jesus Christ,” and in 2 Tim. 3:8, where it refers to two actual men.

In response, opponents increasingly emphasized the importance of retaining the *form* of the original in order to retain masculine *nuances* of meaning. The literature opposing gender-inclusive language commonly refers to the need to preserve as much as possible the masculine “nuances” that were part of the original cultural context.¹⁷ To lose such nuances risks distorting God’s Word. It is sometimes said that readers who might misperceive or be offended by masculine terms can be taught that these terms are not in fact meant to be exclusive or offensive. The responsibility is thus placed on the target audience to learn the language and culture of the source text. Formal equivalence was viewed as the best way to remain faithful to God’s Word.

A second key factor for this shift from gender issues to translation philosophy was the publication of the *English Standard Version* (ESV). The ESV project had been initiated in the early 1990s, when Crossway publishers gained permission from the National Council of Churches to use the 1971 RSV text as the basis for a new translation. The twelve member oversight committee for the ESV included both Wayne Grudem and Vern Poythress, who had led the charge against gender-inclusive language.¹⁸ The ESV therefore became part of the “answer” to the (so-called) liberalizing tendency of the NIV’s gender-inclusive language.

The key marketing slogan for the ESV was, “an essentially literal version” and so the defense of this translation philosophy became central both to the promotion of the ESV and to the *opposition* of the NIV and other gender inclusive versions.

In 2002, Leland Ryken, professor of English at Wheaton College and English stylist for the ESV, wrote a lengthy volume called *The Word of God in English. Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*,¹⁹ a thoroughgoing defense of formal equivalence and Bible Translation. Poythress, Grudem, Ryken and other members of the ESV committee also produced a volume called *Translating Truth, The Case for Essentially Literal Bible Translation* (2005). The lead article in this book by Grudem was entitled, “Are Only *Some* Words of Scripture Breathed Out by God? Why Plenary Inspiration Favors ‘Essentially Literal’ Bible Translation.” The basic thesis of this article was:

(1) that the Bible repeatedly claims that every one of its words (in the original languages) is a word spoken to us by God...and, (2) that this fact provides a strong argument in favor of “essentially literal” (or “word-for-word”) translation as opposed to “dynamic equivalent” (or “thought-for-thought”) translation.

¹⁷ See Poythress and Grudem, *Gender Neutral, passim*.

¹⁸ The ESV included a 12 member oversight committee and 50 translation review scholars. None of these were women. See <http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv-translators.html>

¹⁹ Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English. Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Crossway, 2002). See my review in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 46.4 (Dec. 2003), 738-740.

Grudem is of course here echoing the language evangelicals use to describe inspiration, speaking of the “verbal and plenary” inspiration of Scripture. Article IV of the Chicago Statement on biblical inerrancy—a standard for evangelicals—reads,

WE AFFIRM that the whole of Scripture and all its parts, *down to the very words of the original*, were given by divine inspiration.

Of course the great problem for translators is that the “very words” are *the original Greek and Hebrew words*, not the English ones. Grudem’s claim—that a so-called “essentially literal” translation more accurately represents these words—simply skips over any consideration of linguistics and translation theory and *assumes* its own conclusion. *Does formal equivalence by its nature preserve the meaning of the text?* We could all point to a myriad of examples showing that it does not.

The problem, of course, is that the translation of *every word* is in fact an act of interpretation and languages differ not only in terms of word meanings, but also in terms of grammatical structures, idioms, and collocations. Equally important are the disconnects between social and cultural assumptions of source and target audiences.

Although it is certainly linguistically naïve to assume that formal equivalence, by its nature, more accurately reproduces God’s Word, this point raises the important question of what components and features of the language are important to preserve and which might be sacrificed. For evangelicals this is a particularly pressing issue. After all, this is not just a book of history or a record of a religious movement. It is *God’s self-revelation—his divine Word*. It is the life-giving message of salvation. It is a message that not only must be heard. It must be heeded and proclaimed to others.

Foreignizing versus Domesticating

This tension between preservation and communication is sometimes referred to as the difference between a foreignizing versus a domesticating translation. Foreignizing means you keep the distance between source text and receptor audience as great as possible. Readers ought to recognize while reading that this is a foreign book.

This is a challenging balance to maintain. After all, we want our readers to hear God’s Word as a message for them. With reference to the inclusive language debate we want readers to comprehend clearly the inclusive nature of masculine generics. If a reader perceives a generic reference as exclusive, that translation has failed, and the good news has not been proclaimed.

Andreas Köstenberger, originally an opponent of gender inclusive language, who subsequently called himself a “cautious convert,” writes this in a book review of my book on gender language;

The other day, my six-year-old daughter Lauren and I read the gospel account in which Jesus promises to make his followers "fishers of men" (or so it read in the NIV that we were using). My daughter commented: "Daddy, I'm going to be a fisher of *women*," and then adding, with customary "generosity," "Tahlia [her younger sister], she can be a fisher of *men*."

Köstenberger continues:

I was struck by the perceptive nature of my daughter's remark: unaware of the recent inclusive-language controversy, she had unwittingly yet intuitively picked up on the need for Bible translators in this day and age to be sensitive to how they render gender-related terms in Scripture.²⁰

This is certainly true. We don't want to put up obstacles for our readers.

At the same time, overly domesticating a text can produce hazards for those who fail to recognize the very different cultures in which the Bible was given.

In a helpful article on ideology and translation, Roy Ciampa notes the potential danger of misrepresenting identity markers when translators simplify and domesticate the text for contemporary readers.²¹ For example, Paul's admonitions related to female submission and patriarchal authority have been used to justify the exploitation of women when the cultural patriarchy of the Greco-Roman world is not taken into account. Similarly in a post-Holocaust world the Johannine community's struggle with the larger Jewish community can be mistaken for anti-Semitism if not understood in its appropriate context of an internecine struggle between two groups of Jews, each claiming to be the true people of God.

This point has application for what is becoming the most controversial social and ethical issue in the North American church, that of same-sex relationships. How do we translate New Testament terms related to homosexuality? Ciampa points out that the term "homosexual" is of relatively recent vintage and may bring with it connotations alien to the first century world. By translating a term like *arsenokoites* as "homosexuals," we risk misrepresenting its first century meaning for contemporary readers.

Modern readers...are led to believe that Paul has "homosexuals" in mind (whether practicing or not) rather than men in his own world who practiced forms of sexual exploitation (mainly of other males) that were familiar to his ancient readers but possibly quite foreign to us.²²

²⁰Andreas Köstenberger, Review of *The Inclusive Language Debate: A Plea for Realism*, by D. A. Carson and *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation and Gender Accuracy*, by Mark L. Strauss, in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 42 (1999): 689–93.

²¹ Roy E. Ciampa, "Ideological Challenges for Bible Translators," *International Journal of Frontier Missiology*; 28:3 Fall 2011, 139-148.

²² Ciampa, "Ideological Challenges," 145.

Dr. Ciampa is not suggesting that the apostle Paul would approve of same-sex relationships of any kind, but only that introducing a contemporary term like “homosexual” may be an inappropriate domestication of the text that misrepresents the original cultural context.

What is the appropriate balance between preservation and communication, domestication and foreignization? Foreignizing risks obscuring the message and restricting access to the text, Domesticating risks distorting the meaning for contemporary readers. How do we remind our readers that they are reading a foreign text, yet still stress the vibrancy and relevancy of the text as God’s Word to them?

I have found particularly help in this regard the literature that moves away from the language of equivalence—whether formal or functional—to communication models that take into account differences in culture and context. In her volume, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads: From Translation to Communication*, Harriet Hill emphasizes the need to build shared assumptions between source language and receptor communities.²³ Without taking into account differences in culture, values, worldviews, etc., communication will fail. This idea builds on the communication model of Relevance Theory, especially as applied to translation by Ernst August Gutt and others.²⁴ Communication is successful if it produces adequate cognitive effects with minimal processing efforts. Translation is not just about finding lexical equivalents; it is building a bridge of share assumptions between a source language text and receptor community.

One of the most challenging issues for translators in this regard are biblical metaphors and metaphorical idioms. In his critique of dynamic equivalence, Grudem focuses especially on the metaphors of Scripture, criticizing dynamic equivalence for leaving out words that were part of God’s Word. For example, while formal equivalent versions render Romans 13:4, “[a ruler]...*does not bear the sword in vain*,” the New Century Version renders, “[a ruler]...*has the power to punish*.” Similarly, while the ESV renders Acts 19:11, “God was doing extraordinary miracles *by the hands* of Paul,” the NIV simply says, “God did extraordinary miracles *through Paul*” (cf. NLT, CEV, NCV). According to Grudem, by removing words like “sword” and “hands” that God put in the text, translators are compromising the authority of God’s Word.

Of course we know the situation is far more complex than this. These versions are seeking to provide more idiomatic English or to clarify the meaning of metaphors for remedial readers who might not understand them. More importantly, from a linguistic perspective, such examples often represent dead metaphors. The idiom

²³ Harriet Hill, *The Bible at Cultural Crossroads. From Translation to Communication* (Manchester, U.K. & Kinderhook, USA: St. Jerome, 2006).

²⁴ See Ernst-August Gutt, *Translation and Relevance: Cognition and Context* (St. Jerome, 2nd ed. 2000).

“bear the sword” (Rom. 13:4) was such a set phrase in the first century that readers almost certainly did not envision a literal sword, but instead thought immediately of the administration of judicial punishment. “Sword” is metonymy for governmental authority.

While this particular criticism may be simplistic, it raises the important question of how best to translate biblical metaphors. How far down into the structure of the language does inspiration and authority go? In my opinion, one of the most difficult and challenging of biblical metaphors is that related to walking. The Greek verb περιπατέω has within its semantic range both literal walking and the metaphorical sense of conducting oneself in a particular manner. In many cases the translation “live” is no doubt more accurate. First Corinthians 3:3 says, “For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, ... Are you not acting [περιπατεῖτε] like mere humans?” “Walk” makes little sense here. In other contexts, however, it is difficult to tell whether life is being viewed as a journey, so that the reader is to envision a pilgrim along a path. For example, Ephesians 5:8 “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live [περιπατεῖτε] as children of light.” Does the image of darkness and light here imply life as a walking journey, either in daylight or at night? If so, the metaphor might be important to retain.

Of course for those working in a Muslim contexts, by far the most controversial issue with regard to metaphorical language relates to translating divine sonship language related to Jesus. Is this familial language intended to be metaphorical? And if so, is it acceptable to replace the familial language of sonship with a different metaphor, which captures the sense of intimacy or relationship but does not result in immediate rejection by Muslims hearers. There are many complex issues related to this question, but certainly one key factor is the question of preservation versus communication. How much should we preserve the metaphors of Scripture, especially those related to the identity of the Savior? On the other side, how much should we do to lower the barriers that hinder effective communication.

Again, contemporary translation theory may provide insights toward resolution. In a 2013 article published in *Neotestamentica*, Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Jacobus Naudé examine this thorny issue. After discussing the strengths and weaknesses of various options, they propose a functionalist approach that moves beyond the concept of equivalence and instead focuses on the intended function of the text with reference to the target audience.²⁵

They conclude:

A functionalist approach advocates for an approach that is specifically related to a specific language group in a specific location with specific goals for the translation—these are the clients for whom the translation should be

²⁵ Cynthia Miller-Naudé and Jacobus Naudé, “Ideology and Translation Strategy in Muslim-Sensitive Bible Translations,” *Neotestamentica* 47.1 (2013), 171–190.

made. They alone, not donors or sponsoring agencies or translation consultants, can work with the translator to produce a translation brief, and hence a translation that they will consider adequate.²⁶

Conclusion: Inevitable Tensions for Evangelical Translators

Let me just summarize and bring together a few conclusions from both my sessions. Translation is difficult enough under any circumstances. Yet evangelicals face additional challenges and inevitable tensions:

1. The Inspiration & Authority of Scripture: How do we handle apparent discrepancies? As evangelicals, we have a high view of Scripture as God’s inspired and authoritative Word. This belief is based especially on presuppositions related to the nature of God. As a perfect and reliable God, he has revealed himself reliably through his Word. *But how much do we allow this assumption to govern the way translate the text?* When does resolving apparent contradictions become twisting Scripture to force our own conclusions?

2. Strong theological convictions: How do we keep our theological convictions from invalidating our results? As evangelicals we are people of conviction. The Bible is not just a book of history. It is not just human reflections about God. It is God’s communication and so foundational for our lives and theology. Yet how do we avoid imposing our theological convictions—whether Calvinistic or Arminian, dispensational or reformed, complementarian or egalitarian—upon the text?

3. Respect for the source text and a passion to make its truth known to a lost world. As evangelicals we have enormous respect for the world of the text. Accurate exegesis is essential to our task. We want to hear the text as it was originally heard. Yet we also recognize that our ultimate goal is not to teach our readers about the world of the Ancient Near East or the Greco-Roman world. It is to bring this life-giving message to a lost world. How do we preserve the accuracy of the message while clearly and unambiguously communicating its life-giving message?

In my first session I emphasized three things we need to constantly bring to our task. Let me just return to these now—*transparency, integrity and humility.*

- *Transparency:* Acknowledging our convictions and presuppositions, not veiling them in claims of complete “objectivity.”
- *Integrity:* Always seeking first and foremost *fidelity to the text and its message* rather than our own agendas. This is never easy. But can be accomplished through consistent dialogue with those who may not share our values.
- *Humility:* Admitting our inadequacy and living in prayerful dependence on God’s Spirit to guide us.

Keeping these in mind, we seek to honor God and remain faithful to this profoundly

²⁶ Miller-Naudé and Naudé, “Ideology,” 187.

important task to which we are called.