

WHY WE DISAGREE ON THE NIV (2)

“Rather free or too free” and “a move for the worse?”

In our previous editorial (a) on the New International Version (NIV) we quoted Dr. Jacob Van Bruggen, and we noted that “the theory of dynamic equivalence leads to (Bible, RD) translations that remove themselves too far from the original form of the message.” (b) In the words of Gen. Synod 1980, this leads to translations that are “rather free or too free.” When we review the Acts of Gen. Synod 1980, we read: “The Committee understands its mandate in such a way that one translation should be recommended to the Churches. It asks the question: ‘Did our study of the NASB and the NIV result in a preference of one of these modern translations above the RSV?’ It answers, ‘On the basis of our comparative study our answer is negative.’” (Observation, B5, p.76) Furthermore, we read that “the NIV has a beauty of its own because of its clarity and its freshness of expression. There is, however, another side to the coin, that, namely, the translation is rather free or too free.” (p.231) And, as we observed in our May 23/98 editorial, “when we decide to use a theory of translation (dynamic equivalence) that leads to translations that remove themselves too far from the original form of the message, then it is indeed possible that we run the risk of mistranslating Scripture.”

The sentiment that the NIV is “rather free or too free” is shared by many others. Prof. J. De Jong, in his article “Which Version Now?”, wrote that “the Synod of Smithville 1980, which first dealt with the NIV, recommended the use of the RSV above that of the NIV specifically because of the character of the RSV translation. In its consideration it noted that the majority report of the Committee reporting to Synod said that the RSV is a ‘scholarly word for word translation’ and that the English of the RSV is ‘dignified and best suited for liturgical use...’ Compared to the colloquial character of modern speech, the translators of the RSV preserved dignity of language... The NIV was seen by all committee members as ‘too free’ or ‘too interpretive.’ The majority Committee also stated that ‘...the so-called dynamic equivalent manner of translation makes the version too free for use in the pulpit.’ Hence the Synod 1980 decided to adopt the RSV in the confessions and liturgical forms.” (c)

General Synod 1995 also records the sentiment that the NIV is considered to be “rather free or too free” in its translation. Under the title “Linguistic Character of Translation” it observes that “we have found occasions when the NIV is freer than we believe to be acceptable, and on these points the translators really should be called to account on the basis of their own commitment to the authority of Scripture.” (Observations, B2d, p.34) Under “Correspondence Received” we note that the Church at “Port Kells refers to the Report of the Committee on Bible Translations which reported to Gen. Synod 1980 that the NIV lacked exactness and faithfulness for its ‘free’ translation.” (C #1, p.35)

In his article “The End of Uniformity,” Prof. DeJong writes that the NIV “is not a translation of the words of Scripture, but of the ‘thought of the biblical writers.’ These ‘biblical writers’ are obviously regarded as people who write in their own ‘thought patterns and syntax.’ So the translators focused not primarily on the words (i.e. what was written) but on ‘contextual meanings’ of words, the thoughts the words are meant to convey. Accuracy here is regarded as a faithful

rendering not of what was written, but of the ‘meaning’ of the ‘writer.’ Here a new principle of translation is introduced, one which to my mind threatens our understanding of the way in which the Scriptures ought to be understood and transmitted... There is an implicit step back from the text to the thought of the text. ...a move to the NIV is not a move for the better but for the worse.” (e)

When we read what Prof. De Jong has written, we are left with some questions. Is it true, as Prof. de Jong suggests that our move to the NIV is indeed “a move for the worse?” And if that is in fact the case, what brought about this move to the NIV? There are, no doubt, a number of possible or probable answers to these questions. Perhaps this so called “move for the worse” is in part attributable to the assumption that the RSV Bible would, in the near future, no longer be available. Therefore a change to another Bible translation was deemed to be inevitable. This wrong assumption may explain Gen. Synod’s (1995) unwarranted departure from the prudently cautious and careful approach employed by previous Synods in the implementation of changes to, for example, our Psalms and Hymns, confessions, and liturgical forms (Book of Praise). The traditionally cautious and careful approach of allowing the churches a number of years to review and test the work of the various Committees before implementing their recommendations, was unfortunately not followed by Gen. Synod 1995 in recommending a new Bible translation.

A number of churches did in fact recommend that “further study” on the NIV be made, and also that “a testing period of three years” be considered “to allow further testing of this translation.” These recommendations were summarily dismissed with what might be considered a rather prejudiced and pretentious response. Gen. Synod (1995) considered that “a testing period for the NIV with the involvement of ministers and the churches before a final recommendation of the NIV is not necessary since the Committee has already thoroughly studied the NIV, and has come to a conclusion of its strengths and weaknesses. Therefore it can be expected that further testing will only demonstrate the same strengths and weaknesses.” (Art. 72, consideration F, p.37) Simply put: The Committee “has already thoroughly studied the NIV.” Therefore the Committee’s recommendations are absolute and final. A opinion different from that of the Committee’s is not acceptable and is also not expected. No input “or involvement of ministers and the churches” is required. A testing period is not necessary. Further deliberation or re-consideration is not required.

It is regrettable that Synod 1998, in spite of a number of appeals to reconsider our move to the NIV, has opted for the status quo. The appeal of the church at Elora that “the NIV is too free” was dismissed with the consideration / observation that “a careful paraphrase is sometimes more accurate than a literal translation.” We note the word “sometimes.” The church at London also appealed the decision of Gen. Synod. It asserts that “there is no ‘systematic attempt’ in the acts of Gen. Synod 1995 to ‘disprove the criticism of Synod 1980’, and furthermore points out that “Gen. Synod Abbotsford did not interact with the objections that Dr. J. Van Bruggen raised against the NIV.” This appeal was dismissed with the statement that there was “interaction with the arguments that Gen. Synod Smithville (1980) used to reject the NIV,” and that “reference to his (Dr. Van Bruggen’s, RD) criticism of the dynamic equivalent method of translating is found in the 1995 report (p.36, 37).”

When we read the report of the Committee on Bible Translations to Gen. Synod 1995, particularly pages 36 and 37, then it cannot be denied that the Committee did consider and also did respond to

what Dr. Van Bruggen has written. There remains the question whether that response constitutes a proper interaction with the objections that Dr. Van Bruggen raised against the NIV, and whether that response addresses and meets the criterion that "there must be strong arguments to switch over to another modern version." (Gen. Synod 1980, consideration 3a, p.23) It has been suggested that "one of the striking things in the debate on the adoption of the NIV in the Churches is an almost consistent failure to interact with the Report to Synod (Committee on Bible Translations to Gen. Synod 1995, RD) in any significant way." (e) We note the words, "an almost consistent failure to interact with the Report to Synod." That is precisely the point that the churches at Elora and London make regarding the Committee on Bible Translations to Gen. Synod 1995. There was no "systematic attempt" by the Committee to "disprove the criticism of Synod 1980" when this Synod stated that the NIV translation was "rather free or too free," and no serious effort was made to "interact with the objections that Dr. J Van Bruggen raised against the NIV."

In the article "Van Bruggen and Bible Translations: Ignored or Forgotten?" we read that "it seems rather strange that Van Bruggen is not more influential in his views on Bible translations and textual issues. His views are by and large supported by Scripture. He builds his arguments on Scriptural and Confessional foundations. To the knowledge of the present writer, no Reformed scholar has ever gone on record as openly engaging his arguments. (f) Is Van Bruggen being forgotten or ignored? Perhaps some of both." (g) Perhaps we have simply forgotten or carelessly ignored Van Bruggen's assertion that "in the New Testament, the NIV is... too free in its translation." Van Bruggen also writes that "to a lesser extent than in the case of the TEV (Today's English Version), however, the NIV misuses this freedom for doctrinal purposes. Often the NIV does not transmit the intention of Scripture accurately. The NIV New Testament in its present form cannot be considered a reliable substitute for the KJV or even the RSV." (h)

The Report of the Committee on Bible Translations to Gen. Synod 1995 which recommended the NIV for use within the churches could be described as a very detailed and comprehensive report (253 pages). Yet the output of those who have raised serious questions about the usefulness and accuracy of the NIV is certainly not less precise or prolific. There are the books by Dr. J. Van Bruggen (*The Ancient Text of the New Testament / The Future of the Bible*), the critique of G.W. and D.E. Anderson (*New International Version*), the articles of Prof. De Jong (*Which version Now? / The End of Uniformity*), and the report by Robert Martin (*Accuracy of Translation and the NIV*).

In an earlier editorial we observed that "when the experts disagree it is wise to find out precisely why there is such pronounced disagreement." We have subsequently reviewed what a number of scholars have said and written about the matters connected with and involving Bible translation. We have examined, in particular, these writers' sentiments regarding the NIV. Is the NIV indeed "rather free or too free" and is our move to the NIV for use within the churches "a move for the worse?" Is it possible, as some have suggested that the NIV is really a mistranslation of Scripture?" If this is indeed true, then this truth will need to be demonstrated by providing specific examples of "rather free or too free" translation (mistranslation) of Scripture in the NIV. There will, D.V., be an opportunity in future issues of *Reformed Polemics* to examine some of the very specific examples provided by the previously mentioned writers. These writers deserve our close

attention, for, “there is nothing more central to the Christian life than the worship of God. Our worship must honor the Word of God by using a precise and accurate translation.” (i)

RD

(a) Reformed Polemics, May 23/98.

(b) (h) The Future of the Bible, Jacob Van Bruggen, (Nelson, 1978), Conclusions, p.96.

© (d) The End of Uniformity, J. De Jong, Clarion, Dec. 1/95.

(e) Readers Response, Rev. John Van Popta, Reformed Polemics, March 29/96.

(f) Others have critiqued his work, see for example, “The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique,” Daniel B. Wallace, Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society, Vol. 37, No. 2 (June 1994).

(g) Van Bruggen and Bible Translations: Ignored or Forgotten?, Wes Bredenhof, Reformed Polemics, April 26/96

(i) The Mistranslation of Scripture, Rev. K. A Kok, Reformed Polemics, Nov. 12/94.

Fencing the Lord’s Table

By Rev. B. J. Berends

No doubt, everybody knows by now that the Synod of Fergus made a rather far-reaching decision with respect to our “ecclesiastical contact” with the Orthodox Presbyterian Church (OPC), a decision which touches our subject, “Fencing the Lord’s Table.” The delegates of Synod simply did so by deciding (unanimously) to add one sentence (as underlined) to the following statement as proposed to the OPC by our Committee for Contact with the OPC (CCOPC): The churches of the Reformation confess that the Lord’s supper should not be profaned (1 Cor. 11:27, see Heid. Cat. Lord’s Day 30, Q&A 82; Westminster Confession ch. 29,8). This implies that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is to be supervised. In this supervision the Church exercises discipline and manifests itself as true church. This supervision is to be applied to the members of the local church as well as to the guests. This means that a general verbal warning by the officiating minister alone is not sufficient and that a profession of the Reformed faith and confirmation of a godly life is required. The eldership has a responsibility in supervising the admission to the Lord’s Supper.

It is far-reaching in view of the fact that the OPC until now has considered that underlined position of our churches an expression of “denominational exclusivism.” To be precise, the OPC General Assembly of 1987 in its judgment on the appeal by Rev. B.R. Hofford, c.s., stated, “The spiritual hospitality of welcoming love may be imposed upon or abused, and the complainants are properly sensitive to the judgment that may be incurred. But there are other dangers that the complaint does not recognize: **DANGERS OF A DENOMINATIONAL EXCLUSIVISM IN PRACTICE IF NOT IN PRINCIPLE, AN EXCLUSIVISM THAT MAY COMPROMISE OUR WITNESS TO THE TABLE AS THE LORD’S.**” (Our emphasis! Please, take note of this quote in the context of the Press release of Classis Ontario-South, December 9, 1987, Clarion Vol.37, No.6, p.134ff).

Obviously, a profession of the Reformed faith would exclude believers from churches other than Reformed (Sister) churches, the exact position the CanRC expresses in article 61 of the Church Order. And even more so that requirement of a “confirmation of a godly life,” because from which body would any Reformed Consistory/Session accept such a confirmation other than from Consistories/Sessions with which they are united in the true faith?

The above statement on “Fencing the Lord’s Table,” along with a statement on “Confessional Membership,”* constitutes our present Proposed Agreement for Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC. Unfortunately, this Proposed Agreement (minus that synodical change/addition!) had already been communicated by our CCOPC to the 1997 General Assembly of the OPC, via its Committee on Ecumenicity and Interchurch Relations (CEIR).

We read in the CCOPC report to Synod Fergus, “The CEIR reported to the General Assembly that the relationship with the Canadian Reformed Churches had taken an important step forward. It reported in full detail the Proposed Agreement for opening the way to Ecclesiastical Fellowship between the Canadian Reformed Churches and the Orthodox Presbyterian Church. The CEIR further stated: ‘We look forward to the next General Synod of the Canadian Reformed Churches (in 1998) with the expectation that, in view of this agreement it will act to establish a bond of Ecclesiastical Fellowship with the OPC in which we can continue to discuss our differences as churches, and so, if God grants, arrive at a more perfect unity in doctrine, polity, and life.’”

In conclusion, we are informed that this report “was adopted by the General Assembly,” and that many delegates “expressed their joy and thankfulness for these developments.” Now we can be sure that the synodical addition and change will not be received with gratitude by the OPC, or by some of our own members, not immediately, that is. Mind you, I wonder how many members of the OPC know about the content of that Proposed Agreement. The two ministers I phoned knew precious little about it (anymore), one of whom was a delegate at the 1997 OPC General Assembly. The latter suggested that I should contact “Texas Jack,” i.e., the Rev. J. Peterson, (the usual OPC delegate at our Synods) to find out more regarding the significance of this Proposed Agreement for Ecclesiastical Fellowship. I hope everyone understands that to contact him or any other member of the CEIR does not go very far in order to ascertain whether the membership as a whole knows the content of that CCOPC Proposed Agreement and whether they are considering implementing it.

At this time, therefore, it is of greater consequence of what our own membership thinks of this Proposed Agreement, past and present. The greater the unity among us, the better the present Proposed Agreement will be communicated to the OPC, and the more they will be pleased to adopt it to the honour of Christ, our Head, for their own benefit and for that of the coming generations.

Obviously, the members of our CCOPC did not exactly represent our churches, considering the fact that the synodical addition/change was a matter of unanimity. In view of their mandate from Synod Abbotsford, they were, perhaps, more concerned about the ways and means to establish that seemingly elusive “ecclesiastical fellowship” rather than using all their meetings (all seven of them) to discuss with the OPC (with CEIR) what we as churches believe regarding “confessional membership” and “fencing the Lord’s Table,” and why we consider it so important and beneficial for the OPC to do likewise.

As a result they have now the “unenviable” (?) task of communicating that synodical sentence as an intricate part of what we as churches stand for on the basis of the Word of God. I hope that all the members of the CCOPC are willing and ready to do so with conviction, with forthrightness, convinced of the truth that is expressed in the multitude of observations and considerations that led Synod Fergus to this necessary addition/change to the Proposed Agreement. If the OPC is truly a Reformed Church, dictated by what is spiritually edifying and not by what is humanly

expedient/attainable, all its members will no doubt show a Reformed ear and eye for what is really at stake, for them and for us, with that Proposed Agreement.

To that end, I am also writing this article. As you know, the last time I have tried to point out the significance of having a “confessional membership.” In that connection I now would like to stress the need of “fencing the Lord’s Table,” or rather the need of having a “closed Lord’s Table,” the need of allowing only those believers to attend who have publicly professed the Reformed faith, the faith steeped in Holy Scripture, as expressed and confessed in the Reformed Confessions, in the Westminster Standards by the OPC (to be done by all the members!) and in the Three Forms of Unity by the CanRC, as it is done by all the members (who have made public profession of the faith!)

As you can see there is a close connection between publicly professing the true faith and to express and to be strengthened in that faith around the table of the Lord. The one follows the other. What we are called to do at the table is to “discern” the body of Christ, to discern the Christ as He has revealed himself in the Scriptures, from Genesis 1 through Revelation 22, that is, to discern the One whom we have learned to confess in/with those Reformed Confessions. Therefore, not only that we believe but also what we believe is important with respect to the attendance of the Lord’s Table. In fact, whether we are truly one, one with respect to the doctrines of Holy Scriptures, one in our profession/confession of those doctrines, touches the honour of the Host, the Christ of which those doctrines, those confessions speak. The question is, are we truly united with Him, and with one another, on the only foundation He himself has laid and revealed in Holy Scripture? I hope it is clear that the Reformed confessions based on Scripture play an indispensable role in determining the unity of the faith by those who attend the table of the Lord, whether they are indeed truly united and are strengthened in the true faith.

A true faith is believing that everything is in Christ, that your salvation is out of Christ from beginning to end, and that we, depraved as we are because of our original and actual sins, live by grace alone. We are saved, not because of our own will; it is the gift of God - not by works, so that no one can boast. With the Reformed confessions we truly have learned to boast in Christ, as the only Saviour, as the only Mediator between a holy and righteous God and sinful man. With those Reformed confessions we have learned to acknowledge Him in whom we have been baptized, have learned to know Him as the Mediator of that one covenant of grace God has established with believers and their children, that divine covenant with its promises and demands. All that and much more belong to the true faith as delivered to us by grace and as expressed and confessed in the Reformed confessions. And all that and much more we express and confess at the table of the Lord, as manifested also by our Form for the Celebration of the Lord’s Supper. In view of all this how could we ever take responsibility for allowing persons to attend the Table of the Lord who are members of churches which deny the infallibility of Holy Scripture, neglect if not reject the Scriptural doctrine of the one Covenant of Grace, speak of the free will of man, and which deny what we confess specifically in the Canons of Dort as expressed by the acronym TULIP. Therefore, this question: is it truly giving evidence that the Supper is the Lord’s by allowing persons to attend who belong to such churches, thus, persons responsible for doctrines that rob Christ of His honour, the Christ of the Scriptures, the Christ, whom we as Reformed churches have learned to confess in our Reformed Confessions?

Let us then go all out to convince the OPC that as Reformed Churches we should let first things remain first. First there is the call to unity around the Pulpit of Christ (around the living preaching in church), as well as around the instruction at Catechism, in that one and complete doctrine of salvation, to work faith in the hearts of the members/hearers, and then (and only then!) there is the call to those who respond to that Reformed preaching and instruction to attend the table of Christ for the strengthening of that faith. That's what I would call the Reformed order of doing things in His Catholic Church. To that end may the Lord our God bless the CCOPC and the CEIR for the mutual benefit of both the OPC and the CanRC.

The churches of the Reformation believe that they have to contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3) and are called to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned (Rom. 16:17). Anyone who answers the membership vows in the affirmative is bound to receive and adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as the patristic church has summarized this teaching in the Apostles' Creed and the churches of the Reformation have elaborated on this in their confessions. Every confessing member is bound to this doctrine and must be willing to be instructed in it."

(The Synod of Fergus added that little word "as." Obviously, it wanted to make it abundantly clear that we adhere to the doctrine of the Bible as we have learned to confess it in the Apostles' Creed and the Reformed Confessions, which include the other Creeds as well. [See B.C. art.9])

Letter to the Editors

Re Volume 4 #17 May 9 1998 Church News "Rev. J. Boersma has resigned....."

Allow me to wage polemical and comment on the above announcement under "Church News".

According to the Church Order of Dordt, which we as churches have adopted, the churches have correctly limited the number of people who have authority to proclaim and exegete God's Word in an "official" capacity. This task is granted exclusively to the ministers of the Word. (Art. 16 C.O)

Upon ordination and installation to office, officebearers (ministers) are required to sign the form of Subscription. (Art. 26 C.O) There in they promise among other things that the Doctrinal Standards of the Canadian Reformed Churches do fully agree with the Word of God and that they will faithfully teach and defend the aforesaid doctrine. Further they also promise that if any difficulties or different sentiments respecting this doctrine should arise in their minds they promise that they will neither publicly or privately propose, teach nor defend the same until they have first revealed such sentiments to the Consistory, Classis and Synod and cheerfully to accept their judgment.

As we can see then this is not to be taken lightly and neither dealt with frivolously by just sort of walking away from it. In fact the Church Order points out the way Churches may release a minister from his task. First, if he accepts a call to another church. (Art. 9) Second, if he is judged unfit and incapable of serving the congregation effectively. (Art. 11) Third, if upon reaching retirement age or is rendered incapable of performing is duties he may retire retaining the honor and title of minister. (Art. 13) Fourth, he may receive a temporary release for illness or other substantial reasons. (Art. 14)

This brings us to the word “resigned” that appeared in your announcement, a word which is foreign to the Church Order as far as officebearers are concerned.

So then what do ministers really do when they “resign”? The Church Order refers to it as a “faithless desertion of office” and they become guilty of a serious and gross sin which is the ground for the suspension of officebearers. (Art. 71 & 72) As churches we must stick to and apply the things by which we have mutually bound ourselves for the maintenance of good order in the Church of Christ.

It is a sad thing in the life of the churches when these things happen. Sad because the underlying cause of this other actions are not dealt with in an open, honest, and frank way.

How can we proclaim unity from the rooftops when in our own house there seems to be no concept of what unity really is?

Sincerely,

John Bareman

Synod of Free Reformed Churches in South Africa

Short report on some issues from the 1998 Synod of the Free Reformed Churches of South Africa:

The Synod was held on the 30th of April, in Pretoria. It is the first time that all five congregations have been represented at the synod. That includes the “new” congregation of Bethal. Also in attendance, were two delegates from our sister churches “De Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland.”

Important on the agenda, was the report by the curators on the new theological training in South Africa. The positive report was gracefully accepted. In future the students will also be given a chance to report back in a more formal way to the senate on the theological training. The lecturers were also given the chance to report on the classes that have been given in the past 4 months. Also reported on was the AC Barnard-library which has been bought for the small amount of R2000 - (=US\$400,-). A letter of thanksgiving will be sent to Prof. Barnard from the NGK.

One of the most important decisions made at the synod, was in connection with our relationship with the “Particuliere Sinode Friesland en classis Grootegast” in Holland, concerning mission work in South Africa. The Synod decided that a mission deliberation has to be held among all the five congregations, so that no misunderstanding or wrong feelings may occur, that would be detrimental to the mission work.

Another issue concerned the correspondence with the central government. It was decided that the congregations should be informed on any correspondence with the central government. Contact with other home churches, like the “Gereformeerde Kerk van Suid-Afrika(GKSA)” and the “Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk”(NGK), was also on the agenda. Some agitated congregations from above mentioned churches, as well as English Reformed Churches, have to be contacted. A better systyem dealing with these churches has to be made. A representative from the GKSA, Dr. Neels Smit, also brought forward the greetings and blessings from the GKSA, pleading for further co-operation between the VGKSA and the GKSA. A better Afrikaans translation of the Bible on a

formal equivalent basis will be discussed with the South African Bible Society. There weren't any new decisions made concerning relationship with foreign churches, except that a higher financial contribution will be made to the IKGK. The rest of the synod was held in camera. Synod also gratefully, stated that all the churches remained true churches of the Lord Jesus Christ, based on the Word according to the "Drie Formuliere van Eenheid en de Kerkorde"
Bethal will host the next synod in 2000.

Brotherly greetings from South Africa.

Axel Hagg