

# The Battle for the Bible

**In Today's New International Version, pronouns have been adjusted to make the Scriptures more inclusive of women. But this new translation has sparked a firestorm of angry criticism.**

A controversial new version of America's best-selling Bible has divided some charismatic-Pentecostal leaders over the issue of gender references. Since January when its publication was announced, the Today's New International Version (TNIV) has been condemned by detractors, who claim this update of the New International Version (NIV), which has sold more than 150 million copies worldwide in the last 22 years, dilutes the Scriptures by using gender-neutral wording.

Defenders of the new translation, on the other hand, say the scholars who worked for 20 years on the TNIV have simply made the original meaning of the Scriptures clearer. So far, only the New Testament of the TNIV, produced by the International Bible Society (IBS) and published by Zondervan, is available. The full TNIV Bible is scheduled for publication in 2005.

Two months after its release, more than 100 influential pastors and ministry heads—from conservative evangelicals to charismatics—signed a statement saying the TNIV is not “sufficiently trustworthy to commend to the church.” Drawn together by the Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW) and FamilyLife Ministries, the TNIV critics, including Christian Broadcasting Network founder Pat Robertson and senior Foursquare leader Jack Hayford, say the TNIV “has gone beyond acceptable translation standards.”

Some critics have suggested that the TNIV is a translation driven by feminists. But Mimi Haddad, president of Christians for Biblical Equality, based in Minneapolis, says that is an unfair charge. “The TNIV translators are distinguished

scholars. They are doing what careful translators have done since the beginning of the church—making the ancient languages understandable to modern ears,” Haddad says.

There are Spirit-filled theologians on both sides of the debate, including TNIV critic Wayne A. Grudem, a research professor of Bible and theology at Phoenix Seminary in Scottsdale, Arizona. A prominent Pentecostal scholar, Gordon D. Fee of Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, headed the New Testament translation team for the TNIV. Fee is the author of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (Zondervan) and *God’s Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Hendrickson), among other books.

The IBS has dismissed criticism of the TNIV as an attack that “continues to misrepresent” the TNIV and pointed to its own “continually growing” list of supporters. Among those who have endorsed the TNIV are charismatic megachurch pastors Jim Cymbala of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in Brooklyn, N.Y., and Ted Haggard of New Life Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Haggard, 46, believes the TNIV is not gender-neutral as opponents claim. “When I first read a manuscript of the TNIV, I was watching for tampering with masculine references to God or alterations in gender roles within the church or the home,” Haggard told *Charisma*.

“As someone who believes men and women have equal value but contrasting roles that complement one another, and someone [who] believes that God is 100 percent masculine, I was pleased with the TNIV,” he adds. “The gender issues were appropriately addressed in my view. The TNIV does not read like a Christian feminist translation at all—not even close.”

R.T. Kendall, minister at famed Westminster Chapel in London for 25 years until his retirement in February, was listed on the TNIV’s Web site as one of its supporters, but he told *Charisma* that his endorsement was inaccurate.

"When my British publisher asked me for a quote, I gave it approval before I had read it over," says Kendall, 67. "I thought it was an endorsement for an updated NIV. I intend to correct this in due course. I'm very, very unhappy with this. I've never had my fingers burned before [on giving an endorsement]. This is the first."

Although he only recently read parts of the TNIV, Kendall, who preaches from the NIV and is now based in Key Largo, Florida, says he is opposed to the translation. "I didn't know they had these terms that neutralized the genders," he says. "I would have never gone along with that."

Kendall cites concern about some verses from the TNIV, including John 6:33, which reads, "For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

"Their reference to Jesus—the bread that comes down from heaven—as 'that which' instead of 'He' is, seems to me, a dead giveaway that they are looking for every chance they can find to neutralize gender," says Kendall, who called the TNIV an "unfortunate translation."

He is also troubled by several other passages, including John 3:27, Acts 2:22, Acts 3:12—and particularly Hebrews 5:1, which the TNIV translates as, "Every high priest is selected from among the people and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins."

"This is the worst mistake I have found yet," Kendall says. "Hebrews 5:1 clearly refers to 'men' in the Greek, and to say 'people' is absurd since a high priest could only be male. There's no way that could be. I don't even know why they have [the TNIV] because it's similar to what we call the 'Inclusive Bible' in Britain."

Haggard admits that he has "a problem" with the translations of John 6:33 and Hebrews 5:1, and those "should be revisited

by the TNIV translators,” who also translated the NIV.

“But for people to expect the TNIV to be perfect is ridiculous,” Haggard says. “I could point out five verses in any translation and find a problem. When a pastor tells the congregation about a particular word in the Bible referencing the original Hebrew or Greek, he is in effect commenting on the translation.

“In that pastor’s opinion, the translators didn’t get it exactly right,” he continues. “That goes on in 300,000 pulpits in America every week. My point is we all accept the fact that translators struggle in this process, and we’re all willing to work with all of the translations. It’s inherent in the translation process that people will continually have comment[s] on how it can be improved.”

Haggard notes that he supports the TNIV because the translation committee of the IBS, which is based in Colorado Springs, has “promised” that they will continue to work on it. He encourages charismatics and Pentecostals not to dismiss the TNIV because of the ongoing controversy.

“Since we are the ones winning more converts to Christ than any other segment of the church, I think it’s wise that we consider using a translation that communicates in today’s language,” Haggard says. “We don’t have to personally use the TNIV, but we will make a grave error if we poison the hearts of those who would benefit greatly from it.

“I do not endorse or approve of every verse in the TNIV or any other translation,” Haggard continues. “What I do endorse and approve of is the need for updated and additional translations. The TNIV is one of those.”

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