HOLY BIBLE: THE NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION
Hодder and Stoughton. Hback US.95. Large format paperback US.35.

In April 1974 I reviewed the NIV New Testament in the columns of this paper; and in July 1977 I followed that up with a review of the NIV’s ‘Isaiah’, the first part of the NIV Old Testament to be published. The entire Bible in the NIV was published in Britain on February 26 and this is therefore the final part of the overall review.

The NIV is a new translation of the Scriptures, not a revision. It had its beginning in the vision of the Christian Reformed Church in America, and in the National Association of Evangelicals (a group not altogether unlike the BEC). However, by 1966 the control of the new translation was placed on a much broader base — broader in the sense that scholars were chosen across denominational lines and international borders. Evangelical commitment was the common binding factor, but sectarianism was not contained by the rich diversity of denominational backgrounds from which the scholars entered.

Ultimate responsibility was placed in the hands of a self-governing body of 15, the Committee on Bible Translation. This body made final decisions; it did not do all the work. Each translation went through several committees, the hundreds of literal experts implementing those of linguistic and biblical experts.

To the very end of the task, the senior committee encouraged open lines of communication, inviting criticism from those who thought they had something to contribute. (At least one reader of this paper had his suggestions taken into account.) As far as I know, no serious objection or suggestion was ignored. Indeed, a small number of improvements have been introduced into the NIV New Testament which first appeared five years ago.

The vast sums required to finance translation were put up by the independent New York Bible Society (now the New York International and Bible Society).

Some have asked whether this version is a literal translation or a paraphrase. The answer is difficult because the question assumes an ‘either-or’ stance. We may legitimately distinguish between a literal translation and a paraphrase between a literal translation and a paraphrase by contrasting extreme examples: say, the Revised Version of 1881, and the Living Bible. Even in such instances, however, the paraphrastic Living Bible boasts many literal renderings and the RV must resort to paraphrage to cope with idioms English does not have.

When we move away from the extremes toward the centre of the spectrum, the distinction between literal translation and paraphrase becomes a difficult one. It is no agreed cross-point. A translation is too paraphrastic if it conveys meaning other than, or more than what is in the original text; it is too literal if it is so distant, expressed in more confused or less natural language than the original text did to its first readers. In other words, a translation may be criticized for being too literal just as it may be criticized for being too paraphrastic.

From this perspective, the NIV is excellent. It uses clear, uncluttered modern English, yet it seeks to convey the meaning of the original as clearly as possible. The British editions have British spelling.

Criticisms of the NIV’s English have so far been of two kinds, unjustified. Some feel that the language is not archaic enough, holding that archaism and piety are somehow united. Others, enamoured by the Oxford sound of the New English, feel that the NIV is too prosaic, even trite. But how many readers of Holy Scripture have enjoyed the advantages of modern English? At a rate, it is worth remembering that writers of the New Testament used the affected Greek of an era long since past, even though that was the literal fashion of the time. Rather, with modern English, we should use the common Greek of common parlance.

It takes a long time and sustained...
Hopes fulfilled? Fears allayed?

A look at the NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

people to assess a translation ad
dustry. This review is by way of a
report...will be a matter of
realistic at this stage to focus on a
number of passages to see what the
make of them. The passages
are all from the Old Testament,
from Isaiah, and the reviewers
summarized the NIV translation of
and of the New Testament.

Textual note. The Old Testament translators
have been influenced by the latest editions of
Hebrew, but they have not felt the
necessity to do so, and from time to
time judiciously to the Dead Sea
 Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan
text, and other sources. In each
there is a clear footnote. Other
notes are explanatory or offer alter-
native translations.

1.1 reads: ‘In the beginning God
created the heavens and the earth.’
In words, these words are treated
as dependent sentence instead of
subordinated to the next clause.
It is presented as the introduction
in a series of English sentences,
not as in many versions,
as the conclusion of what pre-
ceded. Gen.11.1 reads: ‘Now the whole
had one language and a common
name...’ to be vastly preferred over
‘Once upon a time all the world
spoke a single language and used
the same words.’ which sounds like
a plot of a fairy tale.

Both sensitive to the vast range of
the Hebrew names which match
each other. For instance, it rightly
notes the latter by ‘nech’ in Ps.69.1.

On the subject.

The remaining chapters deal with an
explanation of the significance of
DNA; a statement and critique
of the evolutionists and creationists;
and the origin of the life on Earth.
On one pleasing quality of this book
is that it avoids the temptation
to be defensive and could be
read with profit by an unbeliever.

The author,Millard J. Erickson,
write, is a Christian

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The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid? Ps.27.1.
By wisdom the LORD laid the earth's foundations,
by his knowledge the heavens in place;
by his understanding the ends of the earth,
and the clouds let drop the dew.
Hear this word the LORD has spoken against you, O people of Israel — against the whole family of Israel: You have all come out of Egypt; You shall judge all the families of the earth:
therefore I will punish you for all your sins.’ Amos 3.1-2. The translations claim to have
aimed at language that is idiomatic but not ideologically contentious and not
dated. At this point their success is
untestable.

One of the problems surrounding
the plethora of English translations today is
the fact that, partly because no one
translation dominates, memorization of
Scripture has become a lost discipline.
The use of one translation for public
worship, private meditation, family
study, and mass distribution is much to be desired. For failure to choose a
translation will engender needless d
and in many areas, church traditions
of the Bible for translation will
find many members and adherents
adopting all kinds of other translations
with little thought as to accuracy or
literary quality. If congregations, like
individuals, must choose, they could
not choose better than the NIV.

The NIV is two in number: first the NIV is
a late entry; and second, it has not yet
appeared in study editions with marginal
references (like those of the New American
Standard Bible, for example). The latter
problem will no doubt be remedied
within a few years. For the former need
be a decisive limitation.

No translation is perfect; but this one
revives the evangelistic and glorified
Word use this translation is a step in the right
direction.

The LORD is my light and my salvation — whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life — of whom shall I be afraid? Ps.27.1.

by Keith R. Stokes