

New Bible woos young adults, skirts critics: Inclusive language

by [John Dart](#) in the [March 8, 2005](#) issue

When Zondervan published in 2002 an inclusive-language version of the New Testament by the translators of the older, best-selling New International Version (NIV) Bible, vociferous criticism poured in from conservative Protestants.

Some Bibles from competing evangelical publishers also were reducing generic male references at that time. But conservative critics such as Focus on the Family's James Dobson, the Southern Baptist Convention and the Presbyterian Church in America claimed that Zondervan's TNIV, or Today's New International Version, went too far and was an attempt to be politically correct.

However, upon the publishing last month of the full TNIV, complete with the Old Testament, the dissent from the Religious Right was barely audible, at least in the early weeks.

Some Christian conservatives say the \$1 million marketing campaign by Zondervan, part of the HarperCollins publishing company, is bypassing conservative "gatekeepers" and appealing directly to readers between 18 and 34 years old, according to the *World* magazine Web site. Zondervan trumpeted the TNIV in February as "the most accurate and readable Bible translation for today's generation."

As it happened, the publisher reaped unexpected publicity in January when *Rolling Stone* rejected an ad with a "spiritual message" for the TNIV, saying it was inconsistent with the magazine's policies. The magazine then relented as various media panned the decision.

The controversy helped to create such a demand for the TNIV that Zondervan Vice President Paul Caminiti said the distribution date was moved ahead two weeks to early February.

Nine niche-editions of the TNIV were published, including *The Story*, described by Zondervan as “a chronological condensation of scripture formatted like a novel.” A low-cost TNIV evangelism edition—*Beginning the Journey*, published in cooperation with the Willow Creek Association— contains only Genesis, Deuteronomy, John, Acts and Romans.

The TNIV text, copyrighted by the Colorado Springs-based International Bible Society, was produced by an independent committee of evangelical scholars whose members are associated with institutions such as Wheaton Graduate School, Calvin Theological Seminary and Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia.

A spokesman for LifeWay Christian Bookstores, which is related to the Southern Baptist Convention, told Agape Press in January that it would not decide whether to carry the TNIV until after a full review, including a check on whether any “corrections” were made to the 2002 New Testament version. Major changes were not readily evident.

But translators apparently did go back for some tweaking, such as in Mark 1:27. Jesus summons Simon and Andrew to follow him, “and I will make you fishers of men” (NIV). That became “and I will send you out to catch people” in 2002, but this year’s edition says they will be sent out “to fish for people.” In Jesus’ broader call for disciples in Mark 8:34, the 2002 edition has, “Those who would be my disciples must deny themselves and take up their cross.” Now, the call begins literally, “Those who want to be my disciples . . .”

Zondervan sent more than 100 free copies of the full TNIV to conservative critics who had voiced their opposition three years ago. One recipient was Vern S. Poythress of Westminster Theological Seminary in Philadelphia. “A friendly cover letter asks me to reconsider my earlier criticisms of the TNIV,” wrote Poythress on the Web site of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood. Upon examination, he said, “I find that little has changed.”

Comparing the NIV and TNIV in a section in Proverbs, Poythress noted repeated examples of “sons” changed to “children” and “father” turned to “parent.” Proverbs 13:1, for instance, in the NIV begins, “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction,” whereas the TNIV sentence begins, “A wise child heeds a parent’s instruction.”

Poythress wrote that what one finds in the TNIV “is not faithfulness to lexical meaning or linguistic context, but pandering to modern sensibilities.”

Zondervan has emphasized that its goal is to attract young adults who might not ordinarily take note of a new Bible version. "With advancements in biblical scholarship, updated language and gender clarity, the TNIV is a new translation that will engage today's younger generation with God's word," says a news release from the Michigan-based publisher.