

A RESPONSE TO DR. DEIBLER ON THE COLORADO SPRINGS GUIDELINES

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In this essay I am continuing to respond to Dr. Deibler's essay entitled, "An Evaluation of the 'Colorado Springs Guidelines.'" (Interested readers should first read my essay on "Political Correctness and Bible Translation," responding to another feature of Dr. Deibler's essay.) I now focus on what Dr. Deibler has to say about the Colorado Springs Guidelines.

As we shall see, the basic problem with Dr. Deibler's response to the Guidelines is that he misinterprets them. He seems to be unaware of the key book, Vern S. Poythress and Wayne Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God's Words* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000), which would have cleared up his misunderstandings.

What are the Colorado Springs Guidelines?

Dr. Deibler begins his essay as follows:

A group of well-known evangelical leaders met in Colorado Springs in May, 1997, and adopted a statement entitled "Guidelines for Translation of Gender-Related Language in Scripture."

After a few preliminaries Dr. Deibler proceeds to evaluate the Guidelines (the Colorado Springs Guidelines) and touches on other issues and statements that have come up in connection with the publication of the TNIV.

Dr. Deibler begins the evaluation process with the following statements:

Perhaps the main fault in the 'Guidelines' is that there is no defense given to support the validity of its statements. **The 'Guidelines' state simply that certain forms should be translated in such a way, with no explanation as to why.** It seems as though those who crafted the 'Guidelines' are just saying, "Accept these statements as true because we say they are true." This is not scholarship.

To this one might reply, "No, it is not 'scholarship,' nor was it intending to be." Dr. Deibler expects the Guidelines to be something that they are not. And that initial mistake easily leads to misinterpreting particulars and gets Deibler's essay off in the wrong direction.

What then did the Guidelines intend to do? Let me clarify. I was one of the people at Colorado Springs in May, 1997. I along with others was involved in drawing up the Guidelines. But I obviously cannot speak for everyone else. I will therefore speak only for myself.

First, the Guidelines arose within a larger historical context, the gender-neutral Bible controversy of 1997, documented in Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, pp. 9-36, 299-319. For convenience, I will refer to this book as GNBC. (A full transcript of the Guidelines is given in GNBC, pp.

300-301 with refinements on pp. 312-315.) In March-May of 1997 *World Magazine* published articles claiming that the NIV was about to be revised in a “gender-neutral” direction, and that this had already taken place in a British edition, the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition (NIVI 1996). This precipitated a controversy. Representatives from both sides (critics and people involved in producing the NIVI) came together at Colorado Springs. The Guidelines were drawn up as an attempt to reach a consensus to which all the representatives could agree. And indeed, Ken Barker and Ron Youngblood, two scholars involved in the translating the NIVI, signed the Guidelines, along with critics of the NIVI. (Barker and Youngblood may have changed their minds since; but I am here giving the historical context.)

The Guidelines come out of this well-defined historical context, created largely by the preceding controversy. They endeavored at the time to address head-on the major areas of dispute within this controversy, not to answer all the questions that future translators might have.

Second, the signers included some biblical scholars with credentials, including Ken Barker, then Secretary of the Committee on Bible Translation (the Committee responsible for the NIV, the NIVI, and later the TNIV), and Ron Youngblood, Professor of Old Testament at Bethel Theological Seminary, West (also a member of the Committee on Bible Translation). (For a full list of signers, see GNBC, p. 301.) But we did not intend to issue a “scholarly document,” such as would supply arguments and reasons, and go into all the ins and outs of translation issues. The Guidelines sketched out major areas of an agreement that had *just then* been reached. They were, in that respect, a text anchored in a particular historical setting.

We hoped—I hoped, since again I cannot speak for everyone—that people involved in the actual process of translation would read the document in the light of the controversy, as a proposed solution. The specific items in the guidelines zeroed in on areas where particular care should be taken to “remain with the bounds of sound lexical research and faithful translation of meaning” (GNBC, “Explanation [of the Guidelines],” p. 315.) I expected no one among the professional translators to “accept these statements as true because we say they are true.” Rather, translators were to go to the lexicons to observe the appropriate boundaries of meanings, and the guidelines were to be interpreted in that light. For example, in Hebrews 12:7 the underlying words in Greek were to be translated “son” and “father,” because, after looking at a Greek lexicon, any translator could see that those meanings fit the context. They were not to be changed around to “children” and “parents” as a number of gender-neutral translations were prone to do (the TNIV is not the first). Given this historical setting, one can understand the absence of “defense” and “explanation” that Dr. Deibler would like to see.

Indeed, Deibler has a similar lack of “defense” later on in his essay. With regard to Hebrews 12:7 Deibler suggests that the TNIV makes a change in wording “because that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews intended to convey.” He continues with some explanation, but includes no evidence about the original languages. Deibler is a scholar, but he is not writing a scholarly article crammed with footnotes. He is writing for a much broader public audience of nonspecialists. Similarly, the Committee on Bible Translation (CBT), responsible for the NIVI and later for the TNIV, said in its “Preface” to the NIVI, “At the same time, it was recognized that it was often appropriate to mute the patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers through gender-inclusive language when this could be done without compromising the message of the Spirit” (“Preface, p. vii). The “Preface” provided no defense or explanation, even though many would later challenge the statement. The “Preface” did not claim to be a scholarly work. (footnote 1)

Finally, one must recognize that the Guidelines are a consensus document produced by a group of people who initially disagreed. The Guidelines necessarily leave many details in the background, and do not pretend to answer every question, partly because there still might be disagreements in detail over some issues. They endeavor to focus on the areas on which there was agreement among the signers.

Dr. Deibler is a professional linguist and a translation consultant, and so would naturally be interested in having “guidelines” that would have a very thorough discussion of translation principles, gender questions, lexicography, and so on. This would help beginning linguists and aspiring Bible translators. But of course the Guidelines are none of these things. They were not intended to be. Linguists must beware of letting their own legitimate interests govern what they expect to find in other kinds of discussions in other situations.

Dr. Deibler says, “This is not scholarship.” In context, he appears to intend it as a disparaging remark, and I am sure that many readers will understand it so. But the problem is his. He is expecting the Guidelines to be something they are not. He is ignoring the genre and the historical and social context of this particular piece of communication. He misread the clue about genre provided by the fact that, though there were scholars among the signers of the Guidelines, the scholars did not do their “scholarly thing” of supplying the explanations that he expected. And he ignored the clue provided by the usual designation, “Colorado Springs Guidelines,” which situates the origin of the Guidelines at a particular place, and by implication at a particular time. Dr. Deibler, as a linguist, knows much of a technical nature about human communication contexts. But anyone, no matter how technically competent, well-trained, and brilliant, can make a mistake *in practice* with respect to a particular text. And so, I think, it has happened here.

The problem seems to reoccur in Deibler’s opening lines describing some of the context of the Guidelines:

Though these ‘Guidelines’ were formulated five years ago, they have received little attention until the last year, when “Today’s New International Version” (TNIV) was produced by the International Bible Society. Since the TNIV does not always adhere to these ‘Guidelines,’ it has received an immense amount of criticism from many of those who formulated the ‘Guidelines.’

One wonders from this description whether Dr. Deibler knows the history surrounding the Guidelines. Perhaps he does, but if so, the description is peculiarly lopsided. And it is likely to mislead readers who are not already familiar with the history.

To begin with, Dr. Deibler does not mention that the Guidelines were produced in the midst of a hot public controversy. In fact, the present controversy of 2002 concerning the TNIV is little more than a repeat of the earlier controversy of 1997, as *World Magazine* notes in its cover story of February 23, 2002 (*World* 17/7: 18-24). By itself, this lack of mention of the earlier public controversy is a mere omission. But things get more puzzling. Deibler says that “they [the Guidelines] have received little attention.” The controversy in 1997 did not die down immediately when the Guidelines were produced. People continued to argue about the NIVI and gender policies, but they also argued about the Guidelines, and some of the most prominent landmarks in the arguments are documented in GNBC, pp. 21-28. On these pages I count a total of 29 items up through 1999, not all of which are directly about the Guidelines, but all of which are related to the controversy addressed by the Guidelines. (And of course these 29 items include only the major items.)

Things gradually did quiet down with the general public, because the International Bible Society announced that it “has abandoned all plans for gender-related changes in future editions of the New International Version” (GNBC p. 20, from IBS press release of May 27, 1997). But scholarly discussion continued, and generated in addition to scholarly articles three major book-length treatments: Mark L. Strauss, *Distorting Scripture? The Challenge of Bible Translation & Gender Accuracy* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1998); D. A. Carson, *The Inclusive-Language Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998); and Vern S. Poythress and Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy: Muting the Masculinity of God’s Words* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2000). The first two defend gender-neutral versions, with some qualifications, while the last of the three heavily criticizes them. All three, I may say, took trouble to inform themselves about basic linguistic and translation issues that impinge on the question. Does all this fit Deibler’s phrase, “little attention”?

Dr. Deibler goes on to say, “[It is interesting to note that other recent English translations, such as the New Living Translation and the Contemporary English Version, which likewise do not conform to the ‘Guidelines,’ have hardly attracted any such criticism.] [brackets are his]” He fails to note that the Poythress-Grudem book, GNBC, criticizes the NLT and the CEV right along with the NIVI, NRSV, and other gender-neutral Bibles. Deibler is of course right that these other versions did not draw much critical attention *at the popular level*. But the reason is simple: the NIV is the dominant version among evangelicals, and revisions of it naturally draw more interest among the broader public (GNBC, pp. 13-14).

Popular and scholarly levels of debate

It may be that Dr. Deibler is intending his entire description to refer *exclusively* to the popular level, the level picked up by news media. But he does not say that. And it is singularly unfortunate that in his entire article he gives no notice that since 1997 there has also been a scholarly discussion of gender-neutral translation into the English language. Is Dr. Deibler aware of this scholarly discussion?

There is a context still larger than the gender-neutral Bible controversy of 1997, namely the context of the feminism and the rise of “culture wars” (see GNBC, Chapter 8, pp. 135-161). The social context includes the fact that people takes sides in the culture wars, and that certain kinds of linguistic expressions are seen as signals of where people are in the war (see GNBC, pp. 163-166). Ordinary people take an interest in matters of language and expression that otherwise would not trouble them. Within this context, an initially small controversy about language usage can easily heat up and become a major conflagration. Within a situation like this, it is sociologically inevitable that one will find on both sides people who are well-informed and others who are ill-informed. For example, with respect to changes in gender in a Bible translation, one will find ill-informed people who resist almost *any* change because they suspect feminism, and one will find people who welcome almost any change that looks pro-feminist.

One may certainly try to “clear the air” and make those who are ill-informed better informed (GNBC p. 90). But, if one wants to tackle the *whole* controversy, rather than merely its ill-informed aspects, one must endeavor to become informed with respect to the very best arguments on both sides. Otherwise, one is writing without having really understood. And the effort may easily go awry. Unfortunately, Deibler’s essay does not display informed understanding of one side of the controversy, namely the side that still finds gender problems in the TNIV.

Perhaps Dr. Deibler has read and informed himself in this area. I do not know. All I am saying is that the essay does not display informed understanding. It has no discussion at all of the fullest critical treatment of the subject, namely *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, which would have help to correct much of his misunderstandings of the Colorado Springs Guidelines. The book not only contains a summary history, pp. 9-36, but a section with an explanation of the Guidelines, pp. 299-319. Moreover, the book as a whole provides a larger defense and explanation of the Guidelines such as Deibler was seeking in his third paragraph (quoted above).

Form and meaning

After the opening paragraph Dr. Deibler launches into an exposition of the form-meaning distinction, a vital principle in translation theory. The book GNBC contains a similar discussion of the principle on pp. 58-67. In brief, the forms differ from language to language, but the meanings expressed by these different forms are fundamentally the same.

Dr. Deibler illustrates with examples of the meaning “I am thirsty” from Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea, Alekano

of Papua New Guinea, and Kazak of Kazakhstan. If translated literally, word for word, these come out “my neck is dry,” “about water it has made me sick,” and “my throat is a desert,” respectively. The naïve person who is familiar with only one language tends to assume that every other language will say things in about the same way. It is startling to see the profound differences. And it is necessary for the novice Bible translator to become comfortable with the differences. He must not be nervous about translating “I am thirsty” in a way that seems strange to him *but is the normal and regular* way of saying it in the target language. One can see why this point is important, and why Dr. Deibler insists on it, in contrast to the expectation of a naïve monolingual speaker.

Dr. Deibler says, “The forms, both grammatical and lexical, are all VERY different. But the meaning is exactly the same.” Yes, the meaning is basically the same. It is roughly the same. But “exactly the same”? Is it exactly the same in all three languages in all possible contexts in which the key expression occurs? Are all occurrences in all three languages perfectly synonymous? Somehow I doubt it. Dr. Deibler as a linguist and semanticist knows that in fact absolute, perfect synonymy of two or three expressions throughout the full range of all their occurrences is comparatively infrequent. Even if it is so in this case, this case is not the only kind.

For instance, Mandarin Chinese has an expression for “I am thirsty” as follows: “Wo hen kouke.” Translated woodenly, word for word, it comes out, “I very thirsty.” It does not actually mean “I am *very* thirsty,” as one might think, but something more like “I am thirsty.” In addition, the same expression can be used in the context of a past event, “I was thirsty.” Chinese normally does not include an explicit marker for the time to which the statement refers. “I very thirsty” is the regular “imperfective,” without reference to time. Thus, by itself it is vaguer or broader than “I am thirsty” in English. English through its verb “am” in the present tense suggests present time, while Mandarin Chinese does not have anything parallel to this indicator of time. (I thank Virginia Yip, a native speaker of Mandarin, for helping with these examples.)

Or consider the expression, “I am thirsty,” with extra phonological stress and vowel lengthening on the first syllable of “thirsty.” The speaker emphasizes his thirst, perhaps suggesting “I am really thirsty,” or perhaps suggesting that he insists on people noticing his need even if the physical need is not great. In the real world, thirst is a matter of degree. Perhaps the expressions from different languages are not perfectly synonymous because one expression suggests on the average a greater degree of thirst. Is it mild thirst or intense? Or in between? Or again, in some languages “thirst” can be used metaphorically. Jesus says to the Samaritan woman, “... whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty forever” (John 4:14 ESV). Thirst is a metaphor for spiritual desire for fellowship with God, and Jesus satisfies that desire. Thus, “thirst” in this context may not mean *exactly* what it means in Deibler’s example from Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea.

Or take some other examples from English. Consider the three expressions, “step on the gas,” “speed up,” and “go faster” in American English. In the context of someone speaking to the driver of an automobile, they mean nearly the same. They are “descriptively synonymous” (or nearly so; John Lyons, *Semantics* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977], 1.242). At the same time, the substitution of one expression for another may change “the social or expressive meaning of the utterance” in some cases (ibid.). In this case, “step on the gas” has a more colloquial flavor (at least to my ear), and may have the potential (depending on context) of evoking connotatively the physicality of the movement of the driver’s foot.

Linguistics considers all these phenomena in language, especially within the special contexts in which it explicitly pays attention to them. Dr. Deibler omitted these matters, not because he does not know about them, but because it would have been confusing to bring them in. He simplifies, for the sake of teaching a single important point. Dr. Deibler’s essay appears on a web page, within the website <www.tniv.info>, which is directed to a fairly broad, popular audience. The essay understandably does not get into fine-grained nuances. One must allow the essay the freedom to overstate things a bit to hammer the point home.

Thus, when the essay says, “The meaning is *exactly the same*,” it really means “the same in most basic respects,” “the same for most practical purposes,” or “the same for the purposes of simplified discussion for those who do not want to enter the niceties and technicalities of professional linguistic, semantic, and lexicographical study.”

All this is reasonable. But there is an unfortunate by-product. The simplification that Dr. Deibler makes washes out the subtleties, and in the process makes it impossible to discuss the issues under debate. He lowers the standard for translation. How so? Any translation that preserves the meaning of the original is acceptable. And now “meaning” for Dr. Deibler apparently means only a basic core, and not nuances. So any translation that preserves the minimal core is acceptable. In that case the standard for a translation is *only* a minimal core. By this standard the TNIV and other gender-neutral translations are acceptable. I do not think that Dr. Deibler actually believes in this low standard. But when he reduces meaning to core meaning or basic meaning, he is temporarily reducing translation to this low standard. According to this standard, any translation that gets meaning right in some broad, basic way is satisfactory. Gender-neutral translations too can make it over this high-jump bar, because the bar has been lowered until it is knee-high.

For example, on Dr. Deibler’s level of simplification, “forefather” and “ancestor” mean “the same.” They both designate an ancestor. “Forefather” includes an extra male meaning component, suggesting that we are dealing with a male ancestor rather than an ancestor that is either male or female. But this is a detail that can be overlooked for the sake of simplification. Similarly, “father” and “parent” have “the same” meaning in a context like Hebrews 12:7 that compares the discipline of God with the discipline by a human father. The main comparison in Hebrews 12:7 between God’s discipline and human family discipline works if it is a comparison with the discipline of any parent. The meaning is “the same” on a certain level of simplification. And indeed Dr. Deibler says so explicitly:

Why this change? [TNIV’s change from “son” to “children” and “father” to “parents” in Hebrews 12:7] I suggest it was because that is exactly what the writer of Hebrews intended to convey.

Dr. Deibler says, “*exactly* what the writer of Hebrews intended to convey.” That is, Dr. Deibler is claiming that the gender-neutral TNIV translation has *exactly* the same meaning as one gets with the underlying Greek words that mean “son” and “father” and that are normally translated that way. It is “exactly” the same because Dr. Deibler has simplified and is looking at the main point that the verse makes, namely that God’s Fatherly discipline can be understood and received better when we think of it as analogous to the discipline of a human parent. This is the main point. As long as the TNIV captures the *main* point, Dr. Deibler will overlook nuances of difference that creep in because the Greek has male meaning components that the TNIV lacks.

GNBC has a section discussing this route as a defense of gender-neutral translations. The title of this (fallacious) defense is “The basic meaning is still preserved” (pp. 189-190). That is, the main point of a verse is still visible in the new translation. Some kind of common core of meaning is still there. And that is one reason why GNBC (pp. 82-90) warns against precisely the simplification into which Dr. Deibler has stepped:

In fact the central issues [concerning gender in translation] involve subtleties. The advice to treat the dispute [over gender-neutral translation policies] as [a problem due to] level-1 naivete [that is, elementary failure in distinguishing form and meaning] only blocks rather than encourages discernment. (p. 90)

Dr. Deibler has decided to dwell on this level of simplification, in order to make his point about form and meaning. And, as we can see from the later example in Hebrews 12:7, he continues to use this simplification as his platform. On this level of simplification, he can declare that in a particular verse the meaning “is the same,” or by rhetorical excess, “exactly the same.” He has reduced meaning to a basic level, ignoring nuances. On that level, male meaning components can also be ignored (because the rest of the meaning is still there). Hence, by this reasoning, the TNIV is basically all right if it succeeds in translating core meaning or basic meaning. But in fact,

the debate is about nuances that appear and disappear because of the TNIV's choices with respect to gender. Dr. Deibler is not in a position to discuss these nuances, because he has decided to simplify.

“Father” in translation

Let us go on. After completing the discussion of “I am thirsty,” the essay discusses the fact that a single word can have more than one meaning. Dr. Deibler illustrates with the word “hand.” A similar discussion with an illustration occurs in GNBC, pp. 58-59. The essay also correctly observes that the Greek word *pater* has several meanings. But it mistakenly accuses the critics of ignoring this:

Now, the critics of the TNIV say ‘father’ should not be changed to ‘parent’, or ‘fathers’ to ‘parents’ or ‘ancestors.’ But this is ridiculous. The Greek word PATER ‘father’ can have several meanings; and to insist it must be translated only and always by its primary sense of ‘male relative in lineal order of the preceding generation’ is simply ignoring the fact that the Greek or Hebrew words for ‘father’ can have several senses.

Deibler has, of course, misinterpreted the Guidelines. He ignores the following explanation in GNBC:

The tendency in existing gender-neutral translations has been to obscure the patriarchal character of Old Testament thinking about family lines. In many salient usages [note: it does not say “all”], ‘*ab* (Hebrew “father”) is not simply “ancestor,” but something more like “forefather.” Translations have also replaced “father” in the singular with “parent(s),” without lexicographical warrant. See Chapters 6, 12, and 13. (GNBC, p. 318)

In fact, then, the Colorado Springs Guideline about “father” represents only an entryway into a rather complex discussion, a discussion that would have relieved Dr. Deibler’s misunderstanding.

We should note also the following points.

1. Dr. Deibler’s essay says, “must be translated only and always.” This misrepresents the actual wording of the Guidelines, which explicitly allow exceptions: “Gender-related renderings which we will generally avoid, though there may be unusual exceptions in certain contexts” (GNBC, p. 300); “We understand these guidelines to be representative and not exhaustive, and that some details may need further refinement” (GNBC, p.301). In addition, the very word “Guidelines” (rather than “rules”) suggests some flexibility. The explanation in the *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, immediately following the Guidelines, explicitly mentions one exception to the Guideline for “father,” namely Hebrews 11:23 (GNBC, p. 318).

2. Dr. Deibler’s essay implies that the Guidelines mean that “it [*pater*] must be translated only and always by its *primary sense* of ‘male relative in lineal order of the preceding generation.’” But the Guideline does not say “primary sense” or “male relative in lineal order of the preceding generation.” Deibler’s essay has forcibly intruded this meaning into a context where it does not belong. Instead, the Guideline uses the word “father,” which (as Deibler’s essay admits) has some of the same range of meanings as does the Greek word *pater*; it is not to be confined to its primary sense. The Guideline is talking about the lexeme (word) “father,” not about one sense of that word. Again, a look at *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy*, p. 318, would have immediately cleared up this misunderstanding of the Guideline.

3. The essay fails to observe the significance of the fact that the Guideline talks about “changing” “father” to “parent,” etc. It is not directly addressing the question of a fresh translation done from the original languages, but with change to an already existing translation. The NIV already used “ancestor” in a handful of places to translate

the Greek word *pater* (e.g. Hebrews 7:10) and the Hebrew word *'ab* (e.g. Joshua 17:1). (It also on occasion uses “forefather,” and uses “father” frequently in an extended sense.) But, in contrast to the NIV, one found in the NIVI a systematic pattern of changing “father” to “parent(s)” and “father” and “forefather” to “ancestor.” The explanation in *Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* says, “The tendency has been to obscure the patriarchal character of Old Testament thinking “ (p. 318). In particular, the translation deletes a male meaning component that is there in the original text—“in many of the salient usages” (GNBC, p. 318). Indeed, the “Preface” to the NIVI suggests the same thing in the now famous statement:

At the same time, it was recognized that it was often appropriate to mute the patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers through gender-inclusive language when this could be done without compromising the message of the Spirit” (NIVI “Preface,” p. vii; see discussion in GNBC, pp. 152-159).

Misunderstanding

Dr. Deibler’s essay goes on: “To say the word ‘father’ should not be changed to ‘ancestor’ when it clearly means ‘ancestor’ shows a complete lack of understanding of the basic nature of language and the concept of primary and secondary senses.”

This statement completely misses the point. The point is not whether *in some passages* the meaning of the word in question may be ‘ancestor,’ but whether the meaning in many salient passages includes a male meaning component, “male ancestor, forefather.” If it includes a male meaning component, in context, then one should if feasible avoid deleting that component. (And the NIVI “Preface” suggests that the NIVI did not follow this advice.) The lexicons indicate that in fact the words in question do often have a male meaning component: for the Greek word *pater*, Bauer’s lexicon (BDAG) meaning 2, “forefather” (though “ancestor” is also offered as a gloss); Liddell-Scott-Jones’s lexicon (LSJ), meaning VII.1; Louw-Nida’s lexicon (L&N), 10.20; for the Hebrew word *'ab* Brown-Driver-Briggs (BDB), meaning 4.

What is the difference between “forefather” and “ancestor”? Not much. “Forefather” in most contexts indicates a male ancestor. But both terms (in many contexts) indicate direct lineal descent over more than one generation. The meanings are at least very similar. As previously observed, Dr. Deibler’s essay focuses on a basic level of meaning, a level at which one says that two expressions have “exactly the same meaning.” At this level, “ancestor” and “forefather” have “the same meaning” (because we are ignoring minute differences). But then the essay makes itself incapable of appreciating the precise distinction that is the point at issue, namely whether it is indeed appropriate to drop male meaning components, “to mute the patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers.”

Dr. Deibler’s essay also says that this Guideline “shows a complete lack of understanding of the basic nature of language and the concept of primary and secondary senses.” In fact, what is lacking is his understanding of the Guidelines. Having failed to understand, he is ready to consign the Guidelines to the netherworld of linguistic ignorance. If I understood the Guidelines in the same way that he does, I would react in the same way.

There is a possible reason for Dr. Deibler’s misunderstanding. Deibler knows that most naïve monolingual speakers (familiar only with their own native tongue) do expect that languages will correspond in neat one-to-one fashion. His initial illustration with “I am thirsty” is designed precisely to overcome this naivete.

Now many of the Colorado Springs Guidelines refer to a particular word in Hebrew, Greek, or English. They talk about forms. It may *sound as if* the Guidelines are making correlations between forms in two languages while *bypassing* meaning. But in fact, they are using the specific words (lexemes) as no more than an entryway into a complex process of weighing which words in which contexts have male *meaning* components, or other *mean-*

ing components that should be preserved in translation. If Dr. Deibler reads the Guidelines without any historical context or context of explanation, it is natural for him as a linguist to assume that they are naïve (though there are some small but clear indications even within the Guidelines that they are not as naïve as one might suppose—for instance, the Guidelines permit some kinds of change). Under this misinterpretation they then do show “a complete lack of understanding ...” Since it is now “obvious” that the Guidelines arise from linguistic ignorance (more precisely, ignorance of the form-meaning distinction), it becomes totally unnecessary for Dr. Deibler to investigate their historical background and the later literature, to find out if anything more is going on.

By now it should be clear that there is a rather wide gulf between Dr. Deibler’s understanding of the Guidelines and their actual point. The width of the gulf vitiates his criticisms. He is criticizing phantom meanings generated in his own mind because of the misunderstandings. And—let this be clear—I completely agree with his criticisms of these phantoms. His linguistic expertise gives him solid ground, and the phantoms represent an erroneous understanding of the functioning of language. Thus, all can profit from a great deal of Dr. Deibler’s essay if they recognize that in reality it is not attacking the Guidelines but Deibler’s misunderstanding of the Guidelines, and the erroneous understandings of language that that phantom embodies.

Brothers

Dr. Deibler’s next topic is the translation of the Greek word *adelphos* as “brothers and sisters.” He says:

In the same vein, the claim that the Greek word usually translated ‘brothers’ should not be changed to ‘brothers and sisters’ is again failing to recognize that ‘brothers’ frequently is used in a secondary sense.

Once again, Dr. Deibler has failed to understand the Guidelines in their historical context. After their initial formulation on May 27, 1997, the Guidelines were refined, and the refinements touched on this very area. The refined Guideline about *adelphos* reads:

“Brother” (*adelphos*) should not be changed to “brother or sister”; however, the plural *adelphoi* can be translated “brothers and sisters” where the context makes clear that the author is referring to both men and women. (GNBC, p. 313)

This refinement answers Dr. Deibler’s objection. The Guidelines as published on October 27, 1997, included this refinement. Dr. Deibler could have informed himself by reading the full information about the Guidelines in GNBC, pp. 299-319.

Changes of person and number

Dr. Deibler next objects to the Guideline that states, “Person and number should be retained in translation so that singulars are not changed to plurals.” Dr. Deibler reads this as a general statement. But it is actually talking about the kinds of changes that were being made by the NIVI and other gender-neutral translations in order to avoid using generic “he.” This calls for some clarification. Consider the following verse from the NIV:

If anyone loves me, **he** will obey my teaching. My Father will love **him**, and we will come to **him** and make our home with **him**. (John 14:23 NIV)

The passage begins with “anyone,” indicating that a general principle is in view. It then continues with the pronouns “he” and “him,” pointing back to “anyone.” The verse as a whole expresses a general or “generic” prin-

ciple, applying to both men and women. The use of “he” or “him” in this context is called “generic ‘he’” because it is intended to be understood as allowing application to both men and women.

The NIVI changes the verse into plurals:

Those who love me will obey my teaching. My Father will love **them**, and we will come to **them** and make our home with **them**.

In the process, the NIVI introduces subtle changes in meaning. While the NIV with its singulars clearly points to an application to each individual, the plurals introduce another possible meaning in which the application is to the church corporately. Jesus now promises to come to “them” as a group and dwell in the group. This is a change of meaning. (See further discussion in GNBC, pp. 111-133.)

Against this historical background, the prohibition against changing person and number concerns the changes necessary to avoid generic “he,” and is not a general statement about person and number. GNBC’s explanation of the Guideline also makes this plain (p. 316). (footnote 2)

Hebrew *’ish*

Dr. Deibler also complains about the Guideline for the Hebrew word *’ish*, but a reading of the following explanation in GNBC shows this to be unnecessary: “We and some of the other participants were well aware of the use of *’ish* in idiomatic constructions with the sense ‘each one.’ That (among other reasons) is why we introduced the word ‘ordinarily’ in the guidelines” (GNBC, p. 317).

I weary of responding to these misunderstandings. Even though I have not covered all of the essay, I believe that readers can see the direction things are going. The use of “man” for the human race is explained in GNBC, pp. 316-317, 233-242. Discussion of “son of man” can be found in GNBC, pp. 242-245. Dr. Deibler appears to be unaware of these discussions. And again, he appears to continue to operate at the level of “basic” meaning. He has lowered the bar so that the TNIV and other gender-neutral translations can receive approval in these areas if the basic meaning remains.

Thus, Dr. Deibler has not really delved into the matters that are the actual focus of dispute. For critique of the TNIV, I refer the readers again to the principles enunciated in *The Gender-Neutral Bible Controversy* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 2000).

Footnotes

1. I have since heard from a reliable source that the CBT did not actually authorize the “Preface” to the NIVI, even though the NIVI “Preface” has printed at the end, “The Committee on Bible Translation, 1995”! Regardless of who wrote the “Preface,” it did not intend to be a scholarly work, and the lack of scholarly explanation *in* the “Preface” does not imply a lack of scholarship *behind* the “Preface.” Likewise with the Colorado Springs Guidelines.

2. Note also that GNBC permits the replacement of “he who” with other expressions like “anyone who,” “whoever who,” because these still preserve the meaning of the original (GNBC, p. 111). The primary objection is to alterations of meaning that come in with pluralization (“those who ...”) and changes of meaning that accompany changes to “you” and “we” in order to avoid using generic “he” in a third-person general statement. The use of “they” following an introductory singular “anyone” or “whoever” (see GNBC, p. 216) needs separate discussion; it is not my purpose to address it here.