



The *Revised Standard Version* (1952) and its revisions as a linear emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition

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Revisions of the *King James Version* of 1611 continued into the 20th and 21st centuries as literal or word-for-word translations. This development corresponds with a new age in Bible translation that started in the second half of the 20th century, which involves at least six changes in the philosophy of Bible translation. Firstly, Bible translation is characterised by interconfessional cooperation. Secondly, the plain meaning intended in the incipient texts is made accessible to readers. Thirdly, new critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek incipient texts on the basis of new discoveries of texts are utilised. Fourthly, there is the tendency to remove archaic language to make versions intelligible. Fifthly, there is a tendency to use gendered and inclusive language. Sixthly, the move is from print communication, which can be typified as typographic interpretive culture, to electronic or media communication, which can be typified as digital-media interpretive culture, where sound and visuality become prominent as a contextual supplement to words. In the analysis it will be determined which of these aspects are reflected in the *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions as part of the linear emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition. However, unlike the *King James Version*, the *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions failed to achieve widespread approval from satisfied readers, thus opening the door to alternative revisions.

Contribution: Instead of viewing the *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions as new and independent from the Tyndale–King James Version tradition, it is demonstrated that they are a linear continuation of the emergence of the pre-20th century translation complex within this tradition without replicating the success of the King James Version.

Keywords: *King James Version*; *American Standard Version*; *Revised Standard Version*; *The Reader's Digest Bible*; *New Revised Standard Version*; *English Standard Version*; *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition*; digital media interpretive culture.

Introduction

Although various fragmented accounts of the history of Bible translation in English have been attempted previously (e.g. Daniell 2003:734–744), no prior account has studied the English Bible translations within the social reality of the traditions from which they emerged. Naudé (2022) provides an exposition of the history of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition and its revisions through the first half of the 20th century. In this essay, we demonstrate that despite the remarkable number of new independent versions in contemporary, accessible English, there is a continuing tradition of revising and retranslation of the *King James Version* (or *Authorized Version*) of 1611 and its successors into the 21st century as literal or word-for-word translations. The goal of this essay is to typify the *Revised Standard Version* (1952) and its revisions as a trajectory in the linear emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition.

The prehistory out of which the Tyndale–King James Version tradition emerged as a translation complex had its inception as hearing-dominant communication in the form of the oral–aural Bible in Old English (Naudé 2022). This is evident in the interpretive translations of Caedmon (ca. 680) into performative texts as songs as well as handwritten manuscript Bibles in Old English, which were mostly word-for-word translations in the format of interlinear Bible translations. Word-for-word translations of Bible portions from Latin incipient texts eventually emerged as complete Bibles in Middle English during the 14th century, associated with the pre-Reformation theology of John Wyclif and intended for use by laypersons. The move to text-dominant communication is concomitant with the great age of Bible translation (1500–1945), initiated by book printing in the

Note: Special Collection: Septuagint and Textual Studies, sub-edited by Johann Cook (Stellenbosch University).

Western world (Naudé 2005a; Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016; Orlinsky & Bratcher 1991:29–154). This is the context for the emergence of the English Bible in modern English associated with William Tyndale (ca. 1494–1536). It emerged further by revisions and retranslations until the *King James Version* was eventually realised in 1611. After 1611, revisions followed in two phases. The first phase involved revisions for accuracy until 1769 with the *King James Revised (Blayney) Edition*. The second phase involved revisions for language modernisation since the 1800s. After the Second World War, new technology as well as new thinking in the fields of philosophy, religion and linguistics led to a next great age of Bible translation marked by the proliferation of Bible translations (Naudé 2005a; Orlinsky & Bratcher 1991:179–205).

As described in Naudé (2022), the theoretical framework of our research assumes that a translation emerges from a complex interaction of texts and other systems (Marais 2014, 2019; see also Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2019a, 2019b). Translation is the entire process of meaning-making and meaning-taking, as signs are interpreted and reinterpreted beyond interlingual translation. In this way, translation plays a role in the emergence of social reality. Complex systems are adaptive, dynamic (constantly changing) and emergent (having the tendency to self-organise to reach a subsequently higher state) and follow particular trajectories because of the influence of attractors. Working within a complexity approach to translation, Marais (2019) proposed the terms ‘incipient sign systems’ and ‘subsequent sign systems’ in place of the traditional terminology of ‘source text’ and ‘target text’, respectively, in order to conceptualise translation as semiotic processes. Incipient sign systems, ‘according to various conventions, act as initiating semiotic systems from which the subsequent sign systems are constructed’ (2019:53, see also 72, 74–75, 123–125). We use ‘incipient text(s)’ to refer to all of the multifaceted, complex and emergent features that provide input into the translation process and ‘subsequent text(s)’ to include all of the texts that emerge out of the translation process. Critically, the use of these terms means that a particular biblical version may function within the semiotic meaning-making processes of translation both as an incipient text (for subsequent texts) and as a subsequent text. The term ‘revision’ in this essay refers to the process of editing, correcting or modernising an existing translation for republication (see also Mossop 2011). Revisions are complex processes involving a network approach that identifies historical and synchronic relations between agents and texts, institutions or contexts (Albachten & Gürçağlar 2019). The new forms and new meanings that Bible translations create emerge from semiotic processes as we move forward in time, thus keeping the Bible and/or a specific translation tradition alive. Our project creates new knowledge concerning the sociohistorical and translational context of this tradition, the emergence of incipient (or source) texts, the translation process and strategies employed (especially to establish the nature and style of the language of the translations), the nature of the translation (in terms of form and meaning) and its content (in terms of doctrine and academia), its reception

and the contribution of the revisions and retranslations. Engaging the topic of Bible translation in this innovative way will serve to develop a model for future research on the history of Bible translation in other languages.

This essay is organised as follows: firstly, we describe the significant change in the philosophy of translation studies and Bible translation beginning in the second half of the 20th century. Secondly, we describe the *Revised Standard Version* (1952) as a revision of the *American Standard Version* of 1901. Although the English Bible translations and their revisions within the Roman Catholic tradition will be dealt with in a separate essay, relevant aspects of the *Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition* [1966, 2006] will be analysed here. Thirdly, we describe revisions of the *Revised Standard Version*, namely *The Reader's Digest Bible* and the *New Revised Standard Version*. Fourthly, we deal with the *English Standard Version* as a revision of the *Revised Standard Version* that was a reaction based on the unsatisfied readers' expectations of the *New Revised Standard Version*. Fifthly, an exposition of the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* follows.

Towards a next great age in Bible translation

The period after the Second World War introduced significant changes in the overall philosophy of Bible translation. We summarise these briefly under six rubrics.

Firstly, the ecumenical movement was an attempt on the part of the Jewish, Catholic and Protestant communities in the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) to cooperate interconfessionally across denominational borders. Ecumenism was also reflected in the process of Bible translation (Robertson 1996:57–62, 103–122).

Secondly, the mechanical, word-for-word reproduction of the Hebrew and Greek incipient texts was replaced with a focus on making the plain meaning of the incipient texts accessible to readers. Among those who played a pivotal role in the development of the theory and practice of Bible translation were Eugene A. Nida and his colleagues of the American Bible Society and the United Bible Societies (Naudé 2005b:77). Nida and Taber (1974:12) view translation as ‘reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source-language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style’. A translation is a dynamic equivalent to the incipient text if the message of the incipient text has been transported into the receptor language in such a way that the response of the receptor is essentially that of the original receptors (Naudé 2005b:81). The result is the domestication of alterity or otherness of the message by shaping it for a new context.

Thirdly, new critical editions of the Hebrew and Greek incipient texts resulted from new discoveries of texts, for example, the Dead Sea Scrolls (see Naudé 2021:98–99 for a summary of the text editions during this translation phase).

Fourthly, archaic and foreign language was removed and was replaced with inclusive language, contemporary speech, global speech and colloquial speech for accessibility and intelligibility (see Naudé 2021:101, 104–105, 110–112).

Fifthly, one of the most significant changes in English usage in the last 25 years of the 20th century concerned gendered and inclusive language (see Carson 1998; Naudé 2021:100–101; Poythress & Grudem 2000; Strauss 1998).

Sixthly, although Bible translation is still text-dominant communication, there was a move from print communication, which can be typified as typographic interpretive culture, to electronic or media communication, which can be typified as digital-media interpretive culture (Naudé & Miller-Naudé 2016). The development of digital technology has had dramatic effects on media culture with the increasing (and now widespread) use of the Internet (see the 2013 statistics for the USA with 98% Internet connectivity in *Exploring the digital nation: America's emerging online experience* 2013:1). The Internet has, on the one hand, promoted globalisation with its capacity for the rapid interchange of ideas. On the other hand, the globalisation of ideas has resulted in the search for local identities and their protection. Both of these tendencies can be observed in the analysis of the Bible translations that follows. Furthermore, the digital-media interpretive culture has fostered again the importance of sound (harkening back to the oral media culture) and visuality (harkening back to the manuscript Bible with its illuminated illustrations); in both sound and visuality, the digital-media culture differs from the print-only era of Bible translation. In the digital-media interpretive culture, sound and graphics have not supplanted words, but they have gained prominence as a contextual supplement to words.

In the analysis of the various revisions, it will be determined which of these aspects are reflected in a specific revision.

Revised Standard Version

Initiator of the revision

The *Revised Standard Version* (RSV: New Testament 1946; whole Bible 1952) introduced the next epoch in Bible translation (Orlinsky & Bratcher 1991:155–177). It was the outcome of an extensive authorised revision of the *American Standard Version* of 1901 within the Tyndale–King James Version tradition (RSV, Preface:iii). The copyright of the *American Standard Version* was acquired in 1928 by the (American) International Council of Religious Education and passed into the ownership of the American and Canadian churches associated with the Council (RSV, Preface:iii).

Translation brief

In 1937, after two years of inquiry by a committee of scholars to determine whether further revision was necessary, the Council authorised a new revision with the brief to:

[E]mbody the best results of modern scholarship as to the meaning of the Scriptures, and express this meaning in English diction, which is designed for use in public and private worship and preserve those qualities which had given the *King James Version* a supreme place in English literature. (RSV, Preface:iv)

Translation team

The chairperson of the International Council was Luther A. Weigle of Yale Divinity School (Lewis 1981:108). Thirty-two scholars served on the revision committee and 50 representatives of the cooperating denominations served on the advisory board (RSV, Preface:iv; see the list of scholars and their academic and ecclesiastical affiliations in Thuesen 1999:74–75). The revision committee worked in two sections, one for each Testament. Each section submitted its revisions for scrutiny by the other section, while changes required a two-thirds majority of the entire committee (RSV, Preface:iv). Specialists of note (e.g. Prof. G.R. Driver of Oxford) were consulted on doubtful aspects of cultural-historical matters, English usage, etc. (Weigle 1952:92). To make this version truly international, the hope was expressed that the cooperation of British scholars might be obtained, but unfortunately, several Protestant churches in the UK favoured the idea of an entirely novel translation (Bruce 1978:187).

Incipient texts

The revision of the translation of the Old Testament was based upon the Hebrew Masoretic text, in the light of the ancient versions and Qumran texts. For example, 13 readings of the Isaiah scroll of Qumran are followed in the revision (Kubo & Specht 1983:50). Departures from it because of copying errors are indicated in footnotes specifying the version or versions from which the correction has been derived (RSV, Preface:iv). Concerning the New Testament, it is stated 'we now possess many more ancient manuscripts ... and are far better equipped to seek to recover the original wording of the Greek text' (RSV, Preface:v). No single printed edition of Greek text was followed for the New Testament, although all the readings adopted are to be found in the text or the margin of the 17th edition of Nestle (1941) (Kubo & Specht 1983:50).

Features of the translation product

Words that had changed in meaning and were therefore misleading were replaced by contemporary language (RSV, Preface:vi; Weigle 1946:53–58). Archaic English second-person pronouns, for example 'thou', 'thee' and 'thy', which are used for both God and humans in the *American Standard Version*, were used only for God in the *Revised Standard Version* (Bruce 1978:187–190). The translation of John 3:16 in the *American Standard Version* ('For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life') reads as follows in the *Revised Standard Version*: 'For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'. This is similar to Tyndale 1526: 'For God so loveth the worlde that he hath

given his only sonne that none that beleve in him shuld perisse: but shuld have everlastinge lyfe'. However, there was controversy concerning this change (see Moody 1959:145–147).

In a 'major departure' from the *American Standard Version*, the title 'Lord' was consistently used to translate the tetragrammaton, the divine name, rather than the name 'Jehovah' (RSV, Preface:v). With this change, the *Revised Standard Version* returned to the general translation principle of the *King James Version* to follow the practice of the Greek and Latin translators, themselves following the Jewish practice enshrined by the Masoretes in their vowelings of the Hebrew text in substituting the title 'ādōnāy' ('Lord') for the pronunciation of the divine name (RSV, Preface:v). The *King James Version* deviated from this practice in only four verses: in Exodus 6:3 and Psalm 83:18, which explicitly mention that 'Jehovah' is the divine name, and in Isaiah 12:2 and 26:4, in translating the Hebrew phrase יהוה יי, a compound phrase consisting of the shortened divine name and the tetragrammaton, as 'Lord JEHOVAH'. The *Revised Version* of 1885 followed the *King James Version* but extended the use of 'Jehovah' to include additional verses in which the tetragrammaton is explicitly mentioned as the divine name (Ex 6:2, Jr 16:21) and where the divine name and 'ādōnāy' appear together ('Jehovah, the Lord' in Hab 3:19). They also used the shortened 'JAH' to iconically reflect the shortened divine name in Psalm 68:4 and 89:8. The *American Standard Version* introduced the consistent use of 'Jehovah' (with footnote to 'Jah' when the shortened form appears in the Hebrew) for the tetragrammaton 'after careful consideration', having:

[B]een brought to the unanimous conviction that a Jewish superstition, which regarded the Divine Name as too sacred to be uttered, ought no longer to dominate in the English or any other version of the Old Testament, as it fortunately does not in the numerous versions made by modern missionaries This personal name, with its wealth of sacred associations, is now restored to the place in the sacred text to which it has an unquestionable claim. (ASV, Preface to the American Edition:iv)

In contrast to the translators of the *American Standard Version*, who viewed the unpronounceability of the divine name as 'Jewish superstition', the translators of the *Revised Standard Version*, in line with their ecumenical thrust, placed great emphasis on the 'long established practice in the reading of the Hebrew Scriptures in the synagogue' and noted that:

[T]he form 'Jehovah' is of late medieval origin; it is a combination of consonants of the Divine Name and the vowels attached to it by the Masoretes but belonging to an entirely different word. (RSV, Preface:v)

They provided two explicit reasons for the Committee's translation:

(1) [T]he word 'Jehovah' does not accurately represent any form of the Name ever used in Hebrew; and (2) the use of any proper name for the one and only God, as though there were other gods from whom He had to be distinguished, was discontinued in

Judaism before the Christian era and is entirely inappropriate for the universal faith of the Christian Church. (RSV, Preface:v)

Thus, in the Tyndale–King James Version tradition, the predominant approach to the tetragrammaton is to translate the divine name with the title. The *American Standard Version* (1901) represents a striking departure from the approach of this tradition, whereas the *Revised Standard Version* (1952) represents a reaffirmation of the traditional approach, applied consistently and with explicit deference to the Jewish tradition concerning the pronunciation of the divine name. The stance of the *Revised Standard Version* continued in the *Revised Standard Version Catholic Edition*, the *New Revised Standard Version* (see NRSV, Preface:iv) and in the *New Revised Standard Catholic Edition* (Preface:xii).

Roman Catholic edition

The New Testament, the Old Testament and the Apocrypha were produced in 1946, 1952 and 1957, respectively. A Catholic edition of the *Revised Standard Version* was published in 1966 in order to incorporate considerations of Catholic tradition which occasionally favoured a particular rendering or inclusion of a passage omitted by the *Revised Standard Version* translators or a footnote to provide a Catholic interpretation of the translation. These alterations were listed in full. As far as the New Testament is concerned, some 67 changes that reflect Roman Catholic dogma are included. None is listed for the Old Testament, except for the order of the books, the placing (or omission) of some Apocryphal books and the numbering of the Psalms. In the New Testament text, the disputed longer ending of Mark's Gospel 16:9–20 was printed, with the shorter alternative in the margin, and the fullest version of the story of the woman taken in adultery, John 7:53–8:11, was included. Omitted from these lists, however, was the alteration of the *Revised Standard Version's* footnotes to Matthew 16:18 and 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (Daniell 2003:742). Matthew 16:18 reads: 'And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the powers of death shall not prevail against it'. The 1952 edition has footnotes to explain the play on words in the Greek – 'Peter' translates the Greek word *petros*, and 'rock' translates the Greek word *petra*. The 1966 edition, however, explains the connection between 'Peter' and 'rock' in the Greek and then provides the Catholic interpretation of the verse, which is central to Catholic dogma:

[T]he name 'Peter' comes from the Greek word for 'rock'; Jesus makes him the foundation on which the church is to be built. The word 'church' means 'assembly' or 'society' of believers. The Hebrew equivalent is used in the Old Testament to indicate the chosen people. In applying it to the church Jesus shows it to be the Messianic community foretold by the prophets.

The Catholic footnote in 1 Corinthians 6:9–10 similarly provides insight into Catholic dogma. The verses in both the 1952 and the 1966 editions read:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the immoral, nor idolators, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the

greedy, nor drunkards, nor revelers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God.

The 1952 edition has a footnote on 'homosexuals' which reads: 'Two Greek words are rendered by this expression'. The 1966 edition revised the footnote to read: 'Greek has, "effeminate nor sodomites." The apostle condemns not the inherent tendencies of such, but the indulgence of them'.

In 1971, a second edition of the New Testament was issued which incorporated several changes reflecting the Critical Text which is later adopted in the third edition of the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*, which serves throughout the world as a standard text for translation and revisions made by Protestants and Roman Catholics alike (Metzger 2001:120). The ending of the gospel according to Mark and the pericope of the woman taken in adultery were moved from the footnotes into the text, although the passages continued to be separated from the context by a blank space, with explanatory notes to indicate that they were not part of the Greek incipient text (RSV, Preface:vii).

Ecumenical edition

In 1973, an ecumenical edition was issued of the *Revised Standard Version*, known as the *Common Bible*, acceptable to Protestant, Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches alike. It comprised four sections: (1) the Old Testament, (2) the deuterocanonical books, (3) books forming part of the traditional Apocrypha but not included among the deuterocanonical books and (4) the New Testament. In 1974, the scope was widened further to include the books recognised only by the Eastern Orthodox churches (Ps 151 and 3–4 Maccabees). The expanded edition was published by Oxford University Press in 1977. As a result, 'for the first time since the Reformation, one edition of the Bible had received the blessing of leaders of Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox churches alike' (Metzger 2001:122).

Impact and acceptance

By 1990, 55 million copies of the *Revised Standard Version* had been sold. Despite initial hopes that the translation would 'finally unseat the long-admired and much read KJB [King James Version]' (Gutjahr 2010:166) and despite the fact that it found widespread acceptance in the USA (and the UK), primarily among mainline Protestant churches (see Thuesen 1999:93–119 for conservative evangelical opposition to the translation), the *Revised Standard Version* failed to surpass the *King James Version* with respect to the sale and distribution of Bibles in America. The 2014 research report *The Bible in American Life*, produced by the Center for the Study of Religion and American Culture, found that in spite of the fact that by 1986 the *New International Version* had surpassed the *King James Version* in Bible sales, individuals who read the Bible overwhelmingly chose the *King James Version* (55%) over all other translations, with the closest competitor being the *New International Version* (19%) (Goff, Farnsley & Thuesen

2014:13–14). The *Revised Standard Version* did not succeed as the successor to the *King James Version*.

The ecumenical drive of the *Revised Standard Version* can be seen as an incipient instance of the inclusivity that is fostered by the digital-media culture, which was in its infancy when the translation was completed. At the same time, the objections of some conservative Christians to the interpretive stance of the *Revised Standard Version* also point to the desire to maintain and promote a particular theological identity in the translation.

The Reader's Digest Bible

The Reader's Digest Bible (1983) is a condensation of the *Revised Standard Version* (1971), chosen for its direct linkage with the *King James Version* (RDB, Foreword, xi). The brief was to provide an abbreviated, simplified and readable summary of the contents of the entire biblical text (like condensed versions of the classics), while the essence and flavour of the familiar biblical language was kept (RDB, Foreword, xi). It was intended for those who did not read the Bible or who read it occasionally.

Working for 3 years with a group of seven editors, Metzger as general editor wrote the Introductions to the Old Testament and New Testament and to each individual book (RDB, Foreword, xi). Although some well-known texts, for example, the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:2–17), Psalm 23 and John 3:16, were not modified, the final result was that the Old Testament was cut by about 50% and the New Testament by 25% to a volume of 767 pages with one column of text to a page (RDB, Foreword, xi).

The *Reader's Digest Bible* is thus one manifestation of digital-media culture, reflecting an abbreviated Bible that could be read by anyone. By producing a Bible that is formatted in a single column like an ordinary book, the *Reader's Digest Bible* is accessible to everyone, but the retention of the most familiar biblical texts means that it keeps its identity as a Bible.

New Revised Standard Version

The *New Revised Standard Version* was translated by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of Churches. The New Revised Standard Version Bible Committee was chaired first by Herbert May and then by Metzger and comprised about 30 members from Canada and England as well as the USA, both men and women, and ecumenical in representation. They assembled regularly and in 1989 issued an authorised revised edition of the *Revised Standard Version*, the *New Revised Standard Version*, including all the books held canonical by Catholics, Protestants and Orthodox (Kubo & Specht 1983:58–60).

This was an extensive and thorough revision based on universally accepted incipient texts, namely *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1983; second emended edition) and *The Greek*

New Testament (1983, third corrected edition). For the Apocryphal or deuterocanonical books, the Committee made use of several texts. The use of textual evidence from the Qumran texts (e.g. in 1 Sam and Is) is innovative. The *New Revised Standard Version* thus continued and expanded the globalising thrust of the *Revised Standard Version* within digital-media interpretive culture.

In style, the *New Revised Standard Version* remains essentially a literal translation; the Committee followed the maxim: 'As literal as possible, as free as necessary'. All archaic second-person pronouns were modernised. It was also the first English version to introduce gender-inclusive language for masculine generic terms in Hebrew and Greek consistently and comprehensively. For example, 'brothers' was translated as 'brothers and sisters' and references to 'man' or 'mankind' were replaced with more inclusive terms such as 'human beings' when the reference was not intended to be gender specific. The *New Revised Standard Version* has at times been the third most-used English translation of the Bible, behind the *King James Version* and the *New International Version*. In terms of Bible use, the *New Revised Standard Version* was used by 7% of Americans in 2014 as compared to the *King James Version* (55%) and the *New International Version* (19%); its use is comparable to the *New American Bible* (6%) and the *Living Bible* (5%) (Goff et al. 2014:13).

English Standard Version

The *English Standard Version* was published in 2001 by Crossway. Revisions followed in five-year intervals (2007, 2011 and 2016). In 2009, the *English Standard Version with Apocrypha* was published.

Relying on recently published critical editions of the Hebrew (*Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* [1983; second edition]) and Greek (*The Greek New Testament* [1993, fourth corrected edition] and the *Novum Testamentum Graece* of Nestle and Aland [1993, 27th edition]) incipient texts, it is a revision of the *Revised Standard Version* (1971) that was initiated by the Southern Baptists (ESV, Preface:ix), who obtained its copyright in 1998 following their critique on gender-neutral language use in Bible translations like the *New Revised Standard Version*.

The publishing team, under the auspices of Crossway Board of Directors, consisted of a 14-member Translation Oversight Committee, 50 biblical experts serving as translation review scholars and 50 members of the advisory council (ESV, Preface:ix-x).

The brief was to be 'as literal as possible', that is, 'word-for-word correspondence', to capture in a transparent way the precise wording of the incipient texts and the personal style of each biblical writer, 'letting the reader see as directly as possible the structure and meaning of the original', 'rather than on terms of our present-day culture', but by 'maintaining clarity of expression and literary excellence' (ESV, Preface:vii-viii).

In light of the translation brief to be 'as literal as possible', traditional theological terminology is retained (e.g. 'sanctification', 'regeneration', 'propitiation') (ESV, Preface:viii). However, in Isaiah 7:14 the translation 'virgin' (= the Septuagint reading) rather than 'young woman' (= Masoretic reading, RSV) was used. Concerning gendered language, 'man' and 'men' were retained where a male meaning was part of the incipient text (ESV, Preface:ix). The term 'brothers' was retained as a 'familial form of address between fellow-Jews and fellow-Christians' with a 'recurring note ... to refer to both men and women...' (ESV, Preface:ix). The term 'sons' was kept 'in specific instances because of its meaning as a legal term in the adoption and inheritance laws' (ESV, Preface:ix). The generic 'he' was retained 'because an essentially literal translation would be impossible without it' (ESV, Preface:ix). Concerning the translation of words for slave or servant, the 2001 edition translated the Hebrew word *'ebed* as 'servant' (rather than 'slave' of the *Revised Standard Version*). For the New Testament term *doulos*, 'slave' was kept, but numerous footnotes indicate alternative translations, such as 'servant' or 'bondservant'. In the 2011 edition, the 2001 renderings of *doulos* as 'slave' were replaced with the alternative renderings 'servant' or 'bondservant' that were previously in the footnotes. In the 2016 edition, the alternative rendering 'slave' or 'slaves' was deleted from footnotes (Perry 2021:612-643). With this edition, Crossway announced that the text would remain unchanged in future editions, but this statement was later withdrawn and the name was changed from the *ESV Permanent Text Edition* (2016) to the *ESV Text Edition* (2016).

In 2013, Gideons International, the organisation that places Bibles in hotel rooms worldwide, permanently transitioned from the *New King James Version* to the *English Standard Version* as their translation of choice, after the text was modified at their request to use 50 alternative readings based on the Textus Receptus. In 2018, an *English Standard Version Catholic Edition* with the deuterocanonical books was published, followed by an Anglican edition in 2019.

Thus, the *English Standard Version* can be seen as a reaction against the ecumenical and globalising outlook of the *Revised Standard Version* through the search in the *English Standard Version* for and protection of (a) certain theological identity (or identities). This outlook is further reinforced through the separate versions of the *English Standard Version* for Catholics and Anglicans, as opposed to modifications of the *English Standard Version* (as modelled by the *Revised Standard Version*) to accommodate Catholic and Anglican readers.

New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition

Initiator

The *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* (eBible 2021; hardcopy 2022) was authorised by the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, representing 38 member denominations, and was done under the direction of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL 2022a:7).

Skopos and translation brief

The goal was to keep the *New Revised Standard Version's* ecumenical and interfaith character so that translation would be suitable in Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and Jewish contexts. The *skopos* of the *New Revised Standard Version* was also retained – the translation should be ‘as literal as possible, as free as necessary’ (SBL 2021a:6, 7). The brief was to bring the translation into conformity with current critical editions and new textual evidence. In addition, new insights about the meanings of the biblical words would be incorporated; these clearly pertained mainly to language use to accommodate contemporary sensibilities (SBL 2021a:6). However, it was clearly stated that the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* ‘goes back to the KJV and [was] an update of the NRSV’ (SBL 2021a:6).

Translation team

The revision team consisted of seven general editors and 56 book editors (with some overlap as several general editors also served as book editors). These editors comprised three teams: Old Testament (or Hebrew scriptures), Apocrypha (or Deuterocanon) and New Testament (SBL 2022b:8–9). The National Council of Churches appointed two members (SBL 2022b:9). The Society of Biblical Literature provided administrative leadership of the project through the participation of three staff members in managerial roles (SBL 2022b:9).

Translation process

Each biblical book was assigned to one or more book editors at the beginning of 2017. During 2018 to 2019, the book editors submitted their proposed revisions to the general editors. During 2019 and 2020, the three teams of general editors met at least monthly to review and discuss the proposed revisions (SBL 2022b:9). During 2021, the proposed translation was submitted to the National Council of Churches for approval. The resulting translation reflects 20 000 changes, including grammar and punctuation, and 12 000 substantive editorial changes (SBL 2022b:9).

Incipient texts

For the Old Testament, the incipient text utilised by the team was *Biblia Hebraica Quinta* (2004–) for those biblical books where it was available and the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (1977; ed. sec. emendata 1983) for the remaining books (SBL 2022b:9). Because there is no single critical edition for the Deuterocanon, the team used a variety of texts that are available (SBL 2022b:10). For the New Testament, the incipient texts utilised by the team were the three recent editions of the Greek New Testament: (1) *The Greek New Testament*, 5th revised edition (2014); (2) *The Greek New Testament SBL Edition* (Holmes 2010); and (3) *Novum Testamentum Graecum: Editio Critica Maior* (2013, 2017) for Acts and the Catholic Letters (SBL 2022b:10–11).

Translation product

The following are examples of revision taking contemporary sensibilities into account (see Banks 2021).

Some changes relate to issues of gender. The masculine reference to ‘wise men’ (Matthew 2:1) was replaced with the word ‘magi’ to reflect the Greek term used by the writer of the gospel, with the footnote ‘astrologers’, reflecting the previous reading of the *New Revised Standard Version* (Garrison 2021). ‘Female servant’ replaces ‘servant girl’ of the *New Revised Standard Version* in Mark 14:69, because ‘using the word girl to refer to a young woman is today regarded as demeaning’ (Banks 2021).

The language used to describe conditions as opposed to identity is also undergoing change. For example, the terms describing enslavement are undergoing change. In Galatians 4:22, the term ‘a slave woman’ was changed to ‘an enslaved woman’, to ‘highlight the fact that it is an imposed condition, not an intrinsic aspect of a person’s being’ (Banks 2021). Similarly, there is a concern to avoid identifying persons in terms of a disability. In Matthew 4:24, the *New Revised Standard Version's* translation of ‘demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics’ was updated to ‘people possessed by demons, having epilepsy, or afflicted with paralysis’ (Banks 2021).

Finally, there is a concern to show sensitivity to religious traditions. The *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* capitalises the names of some Jewish holy days, such as Passover, Sabbath and the Festival of Unleavened Bread, in order to show respect to Judaism in the same way that the holy days of other religious communities are capitalised in contemporary practice.

In all of these changes to accommodate contemporary ‘sensibilities’, the *New Revised Standard Version Updated* seeks to protect and affirm various identities within the digital-media interpretive culture. This version also reflects the features of the digital-media interpretive culture in that it was published as an ebook in advance of its publication in print.

Conclusions

The *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions are part of the linear emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition, which continued into the 20th and 21st centuries as literal or word-for-word translations.

The first generation of revisions in the great age of Bible translation after the Second World War was initiated by the *Revised Standard Version* (1946–1977), which was a revision of the *American Standard Version* of 1901. In addition to updating the translation in terms of new text-critical evidence as well as the removal of archaic language, the main feature of the *Revised Standard Version* is the ecumenical character which was introduced in the compilation of the translation team,

the translation process, as well as the product to include deuterocanonical and related sources.

The Reader's Digest Bible (1983), as a condensation of the *Revised Standard Version* (1971), forms part of a following generation of revisions in the great age of Bible translation after the Second World War, with the purpose to fulfil special communication needs as its primary function, usually a simplified or abbreviated version or a rewriting of an existing translation in a modern vernacular.

A third generation of revisions in this age of Bible translation occurs more towards the end of the 20th century and involves revisions of the first and/or second generation of Bible translations of this age, mostly for gender-inclusive language. Concerning the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989), all remaining archaic second-person pronouns of the *Revised Standard Version* were modernised, and it introduced gender-inclusive language for masculine generic terms in Hebrew and Greek consistently. It has been widely accepted in scholarly circles and has replaced the *Revised Standard Version* in many denominations. The *English Standard Version* (2001) is a revision of the *Revised Standard Version* (1971) as a result of the critique on gender-neutral language use in Bible translations like the *New Revised Standard Version* (1989). Concerning gendered language, terms like 'man', 'men', 'brothers', 'sons' and the generic 'he' are retained with relevant footnotes where applicable to indicate the referent.

A fourth generation of revisions in this age of Bible translation has the aim to bring the translation into conformity with acceptable language use to accommodate contemporary sensibilities. In this regard, it implies, for example, the removal of the term 'slave' as in the 2011 and 2016 editions of the *English Standard Version* and 'servant girl', 'a slave woman' 'demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics' in the *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition* (eBible 2021; hardcopy 2022) and their replacement with acceptable terms.

Unlike the *King James Version*, the *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions failed to achieve widespread approval from satisfied readers (Goff et al. 2014:13–14), thus opening the door to alternative revisions, as is evident from the *English Standard Version* and its revisions. Naudé and Miller-Naudé (2022) demonstrated that in addition to the *Revised Standard Version* and its revisions as part of the linear emergence of the Tyndale–King James Version tradition in the 20th and 21st centuries, there are also alternative revisions and retranslations of the *King James Version* of 1611 as literal or word-for-word translations which emerge as divergent branches of the tradition. This diversity reflects the dissatisfaction of reader expectations in an age of digital-media interpretive culture promoting universal values, with the result that new translations reflect the search for individual identity. Outside the Tyndale–King James Version tradition, the search for identity and the accompanying diversity of types of Bible translation in the 20th and 21st centuries is even greater (Naudé 2021).

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Authors' contributions

C.L.M.-N. and J.A.N. contributed equally to this research article.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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Disclaimer

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