Whitewashing Evangelical Scripture: The Case of Slavery and Antisemitism in the English Standard Version

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Religious communities in pluralistic societies often hold in tension the task of reinforcing core identities and ideals *within* the community while negotiating public relations among those *outside* the community. Christian communities have sought to accomplish both projects materially through Bible modification, with most historically working to establish *transitivity* (congruence between the text and their own interpretive tradition), whereas others more recently have emphasized establishing what I call *intransitivity* (incongruence between the text and negative social interpretations from outsiders). This study examines the ways evangelical translation teams seek to accomplish both agendas simultaneously, creating a materialized instantiation of *engaged orthodoxy*. Drawing on the case of the English Standard Version (ESV)—a contemporary evangelical revision of the Revised Standard Version (RSV)—I show how the ESV editors, while modifying certain RSV renderings to establish transitivity for their text among complementarian/biblicist Christians, sought to establish *in*transitivity between the text and more pejorative social interpretations by progressively re-translating lexically ambiguous terms and introducing footnotes to obviate the Bible's ostensible promotion of slavery and antisemitism. Findings elucidate how a conservative religious subculture, confronted with increasing pluralism, negotiates

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gaining legitimacy for their text *within* their sectarian subculture while also whitewashing "the Text" for public relations *outside* that subculture.

PLURALISTIC SOCIETIES confront religious communities with two challenges that are often held in tension: that of reinforcing core identities and ideals *within* the community while also negotiating relationships with those *outside* the community (Berger 1967; Hunter 2010; Riesebrodt 2010). Though scholars have long recognized how sacred texts—through processes of collective reading, (re)interpretation, and even modification—facilitate the former task, the current study elucidates how sacred texts are also modified in service of the latter task such that both challenges are addressed simultaneously. As an empirical case, I focus on how evangelical Bible translators and editorial teams, having modified their Bible's contents to reinforce the interpretive positions of their conservative subculture, also modify its contents to obviate negative social interpretations from outsiders that might open up "the Bible" (and Christianity itself by extension) to criticism. To provide a conceptual framework for this analysis, I extend the concepts of *transitivity* (Malley 2004) and *engaged orthodoxy* (Smith 1998) by introducing and developing the concept of *intransitivity*.

Much intra-Christian debate regarding the interpretation or contents of the English Bible has revolved around the issue of transitivity, meaning *a seemingly natural interpretive congruence or connection between a text and a set of beliefs* (implying a dependence of those beliefs on the text). In his ethnographic account of evangelical biblicism,[1] Brian Malley (2004) documents how the goal of hermeneutic activity for biblicist Protestants is not so much to derive meaning *from* the text, as though readers came to the text as blank slates, but rather to "establish transitivity between the text and beliefs" (2004, 73). In other words, different "interpretive communities" approach the text with various a priori sets of beliefs, and thus, group "Bible study" is less an exercise in *informing* one's beliefs and more a collaborative attempt to establish transitivity, that is, to establish a seemingly natural interpretive connection between the text and the doctrinal positions of one's group, ultimately in the service of supporting those doctrinal positions. Complimenting Malley's (2004) argument, historical work by Peter Thuesen (1999) and my recent sociological research (Perry

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[1]Throughout, I use the terms *biblicism* or *biblicist* to mean a commitment to biblical inerrancy, literalistic interpretations, and a belief that biblical teaching transcends time and culture, and therefore must be applied to contemporary Christians' personal conduct and social relationships (Bielo 2009; Malley 2004; Perry 2019; Smith 2011).

2020) demonstrate that this transitivity project takes place even earlier in the hermeneutic process—at the level of translation. Christian subcultures, they show, have been heavily invested in ensuring English Bible translations provide transitivity between the text and conservative beliefs regarding Jesus's divinity and Christotelic messages in the Old Testament (Thuesen 1999; see also Vaca 2019, 198–200) or complementarian[2] interpretations of key passages regarding women in the church and family (Perry 2020).

Beyond attempts to appeal to those *within* specific Christian subcultures, however, an equally important development in English Bible translation that previous work overlooks is the use of Bible translation as a form of public relations to appeal to those *outside* that subculture. Among the most prominent modern examples of this, English Bible translations within the past thirty-five years have increasingly sought to replace generic masculine pronouns and other gendered language with more gender-inclusive language (Metzger 2001; Porter 1999). This has often been done to avoid unnecessarily patriarchal and masculine-oriented connotations that would likely be offensive to an increasingly egalitarian outside world. Unlike attempts to bolster transitivity in translation, in which texts are modified to support favored theological claims, I propose these more recent sorts of modifications are attempts at establishing what I call *intransitivity*, meaning *an apparent incongruence between a text and certain undesirable interpretations, which inhibits others' ability to cite those texts as evidence for such interpretations*.

Drawing on these concepts of transitivity/intransitivity and extending Christian Smith's (1998) conception of American evangelicalism as a project of *engaged orthodoxy* (a dual commitment to self-policing theological conservatism and maintaining influence in society), I explore how evangelical Bible translators fashion a text that simultaneously bolsters theological legitimacy *within* their conservative Christian subculture while also obtaining a measure of social legitimacy (and potentially influence) among those *outside* the Christian subculture. I show how this is done through a process of establishing transitivity and intransitivity in their translation. Conservative evangelical Bible translation teams must fashion a translation that establishes transitivity (*a seemingly natural interpretive congruence*) between the text and their complementarian/biblicist subculture while establishing intransitivity (*an incongruence between the text and undesirable interpretations*) to obviate damning social interpretations of the text from outsiders. Following my recent research (Perry 2020)

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[2]*Complementarian(ism)* refers to the prominent evangelical teaching that God intentionally created men and women with essential differences and, concomitantly, designated different roles for each in the family and the church.

using the conservative English Standard Version (ESV), one of the most popular contemporary Bible translations in the United States, as a case study, I first document the ESV editors' transitivity project with regard to gender complementarianism, biblicism, and trinitarianism. I then juxtapose this against the ESV editors' efforts to gradually—and at times, covertly—modify its text over subsequent revisions to establish intransitivity regarding the Bible's ostensible support for slavery and antisemitism.

The issues of "slave" language and expressions that can be interpreted as antisemitic in the Bible create an increasingly salient public relations issue for biblicist Christians who hold that all Scripture is inerrant, and thus, morally perfect. Because of America's horrific past related to the institution of slavery, the word *slave* carries with it the extremely negative connotations of brutal, race-based, lifetime enslavement. Not only this, but the Old and New Testaments can very easily be interpreted as endorsing slavery as an institution.[3] The New Testament is also filled with references to *hoi Ioudaioi* (literally "the Jews") that characterize this group as scheming, jealous, murderous, and condemnable. Unsurprisingly, these very issues have left the Bible vulnerable to criticism from outside groups (e.g., Harris 2004; Lange et al. 2018). By elucidating the ESV editors' whitewashing[4] modifications, the concept of *intransitivity* allows me to conceptualize how a particularly sectarian religious subculture makes adjustments for pluralism, resulting in a materialized instantiation of engaged orthodoxy that simultaneously appeals to those within the complementarian/biblicist tradition while effectively whitewashing "the Bible" to forestall societal criticism against biblicist Christianity itself.

BIBLE TRANSLATION WARS AS BATTLES OVER TRANSITIVITY

The history of English Bible translation has *always* involved power struggle, most often in the form of interest groups seeking to ensure

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[3]Moses instructed the Israelites that they may own, buy, sell, and bequeath male and female "slaves" taken from pagan nations (Leviticus 25:44–46). The constant presence of slavery and its legitimacy as an institution are generally assumed throughout the Old Testament (e.g., Exodus 20:10, 17; Ecclesiastes 2:7; Isaiah 14:2). In the New Testament, Christian slaves were instructed to obey their masters (Ephesians 6:5–8; Colossians 3:22–24), even the most brutal ones (1 Peter 2:18). Christians could apparently own slaves (Ephesians 6:9; 1 Timothy 6:1; see also Paul's entire Epistle to Philemon). And even Jesus himself, in drawing parallels between earthly *douloi* and God's followers, assumes disobedient slaves are physically beaten (Luke 12:47–48) and obedient slaves should expect no thanks for rendering their service (Luke 17:7–10).

[4]I use the term "whitewash" here and in the title because of the double entendre. Whitewashing can simply mean to cover up unpleasant facts. But because the language the ESV editors wished to remove or modify had ethnoracial implications (slavery and antisemitism), whitewashing also evokes the removing of such racialized language.

biblical language supports their doctrines, and, ultimately, the legitimacy of their power claims (Metzger 2001; Noll 2016; Thuesen 1999). The mid-twentieth century witnessed an explosion of new English translations and revisions of older translations, unleashing familiar power struggles among Protestant camps concerned about the contents of new Bibles. Focusing on a watershed moment for such disputes in the 1950s, Thuesen argues that "American Protestant battles over Bible translations . . . have usually been fought only incidentally over technical issues of translation or textual criticism. The true points of contention have most often been theological and institutional" (1999, 14). Thuesen documents how biblicist Protestants publicly rejected the Revised Standard Version (RSV) as "too liberal." This charge stemmed from the RSV translators rendering certain key verses such that it was more difficult for biblicist Protestants to cite them as proof-texts for Christ's divinity or the Bible's Christotelic unity. Indeed, Thuesen shows how conservative Protestant movements for alternative modern translations (e.g., the 1978 New International Version [NIV]) began to minimize the importance of technical historical "accuracy" or any pretext of "objectivity." Instead, evangelical thought-leaders gradually came to understand that the orthodoxy of a Bible translation would be determined on the basis of whether its contents conformed to evangelical teaching, and thus, "reliable" translators must be guided by commitments to biblical inerrancy and trinitarianism.

Though developed after Thuesen's (1999) historical account, Malley's (2004) concept of *transitivity* provides a conceptual framework for the translation debates Thuesen describes. Elucidating the practical utility of this concept, Malley explains that evangelicals are "inheritors of an *interpretive* tradition . . . in which a set of beliefs is transmitted along with the attribution of those beliefs to a text, the Bible" (2004, 73; emphasis his). Evangelical doctrines, in other words, are inherited and transmitted *socially*, but those same doctrines teach evangelicals that their doctrines ultimately come from the Bible. Malley explains further:

> The [interpretive] tradition presents the text as an object for hermeneutic activity, but the goal of that hermeneutic activity is not so much to establish the meaning of the text as to establish transitivity between the text and beliefs. The tradition emphasizes the *fact* of connection more than of particular connections. And thus a great deal of "what the Bible says" may be transmitted quite apart from actual exegesis. (2004, 73; emphasis his)

Seen in this light, intra-Protestant debates over the contents of Bible translations can be best understood as debates over transitivity. That is,

interpretive communities want to promote or create a text that best con-forms to their interpretive tradition and allows them to convincingly point to "the fact of connection" between "the Bible" and that trad-ition. Providing a modern example of this transitivity project in trans-lation, I recently documented how the conservative editorial team of the ESV strategically re-translated the English text of the RSV to bolster complementarian interpretations of key proof-texts (Perry 2020). The modifications were subtle, yet they undeniably emphasized the sub-ordinate role of women in the church and the family. Though I did not use the term, my findings document how these modifications ultimately made the project of establishing transitivity between the biblical text and complementarianism easier for the most conservative Christian commu-nities who favor patriarchal gender roles.

Whereas Thuesen (1999) and my (Perry 2020) accounts help us understand how conservative Protestant Bible translators seek to preserve or establish transitivity in their text to maintain legitimacy within their subculture, Bible translators have also engaged in a project of intransi-tivity between the text and certain negative social interpretations. Though *insiders* are the focus for the former project, *outsiders* are in view for the latter. In the following section, I theorize how the intransitivity project fits within contemporary evangelical Bible translation.

INTRANSITIVITY IN BIBLE TRANSLATION AND THE EVANGELICAL PROJECT OF ENGAGED ORTHODOXY

In the late 1980s, liberal Protestant groups who had been longtime users of the RSV became persuaded that updates were in order, leading to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). Part of this updating, in response to the broader cultural changes regarding gendered language, in-volved removing some of the patriarchal or masculine-oriented language of the original texts to provide a more inclusive translation.[5] Most revi-sions were quite minimal and simply reflected the fact that New Testament writers often had a mixed-gender audience in mind, even if they had used generic masculine terms of address or other language.[6]

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[5]The "To the Reader" statement found at the beginning of the NRSV (1989) states: "During the almost half a century since the publication of the RSV, many in the churches have become sensitive to the danger of linguistic sexism arising from the inherent bias of the English language towards the masculine gender, a bias that in the case of the Bible has often restricted or obscured the meaning of the original text."

[6]Again, the NRSV's "To the Reader" statement explains: "In the vast majority of cases…inclusive-ness has been attained by simple rephrasing or by introducing plural forms when this does not distort the meaning of the passage."

Other translations such as *The New Testament and Psalms: An Inclusive Version* (NTPIV) took gender-inclusive language to a greater extreme, reflecting more ambitious (and admittedly activist) goals.[7] In the case of both the NRSV and NTPIV, the primary goal was not transitivity to shore up legitimacy *within* the Bible-reading Christian subculture. Rather, the aim was to *reflect* changes or even *affect* change within the broader culture. Thus, the translators' goal in modifying gendered language or other "pejorative references" to race, color, religion, or disability was to establish intransitivity, effectively closing off the connection between the biblical text and potentially offensive social interpretations from those outside the subculture.

Similar to more liberal Protestants in the 1980s and 1990s, evangelical Protestants also view Bible translation as a pathway to engagement with the outside world (Brunn 2013). Yet, although American evangelicalism also seeks to engage with the surrounding culture and even "repackage" certain religious messages for the masses as liberal denominations have, the goal of engagement is characteristically held in tension with the deeper priority of faithfulness to the interpretive tradition. Smith famously termed this tension *engaged orthodoxy*, defined as being "fully committed to maintaining and promoting confidently traditional, orthodox Protestant theology and belief, *while at the same time* becoming confidently and proactively engaged in the intellectual, cultural, social, and political life of the nation" (1998, 10; emphasis his). Evangelicalism is thus characterized by tension. It is fundamentally oriented toward outsiders in many regards (Hunter 2010; Lindsay 2007), yet it holds "engagement" with outsiders in perpetual tension with its rejection of theological compromise (Perry 2017).

Regarding the Bible specifically, many conservative evangelical thought-leaders have judged that modern Bible translation philosophies and practices—whether or not their proponents admit to it—are rife with liberalism, sacrificing orthodoxy and biblical authority for "political

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[7]The editors of the NTPIV wanted their translation not only to reflect societal advances in gender equality and language, but "*to anticipate* developments in the English language with regard to specificity about a number of issues such as gender, race, and physical disability" (Gold et al. 1995, viii; emphasis theirs). More than this, in fact, the editors wanted their translation to *influence* the surrounding culture: "Bibles are widely read and therefore can serve to influence the development of important changes in language" and elsewhere, "The editors were committed to accelerating changes in English usage toward inclusiveness in a holistic sense" (Gold et al. 1995, ix). Consequently, beginning with the NRSV text, the editors sought to "*replace or rephrase all gender-specific language not referring to particular historical individuals, all pejorative references to race, color, or religion, and all identifications of persons by their physical disability alone*" (Gold et al. 1995, viii–ix; italics theirs). Even divine references to God as a "Father" were changed to "Father-Mother" and Jesus as "the Son" were changed to "the Child" (see John 17).

correctness" and the approval of secular readers (Poythress and Grudem 2004; Ryken 2009). Yet, such communities are also aware of the negative perception certain texts can potentially engender—perceptions that may present unnecessary barriers to outsiders considering Christianity. In the following sections, I present the ESV as a case study in the way conservative evangelicals have materialized engaged orthodoxy in their Bible, seeking to maintain transitivity between the text and complementarian/biblicist views and intransitivity between the text and pejorative interpretations regarding the Bible's relation to slavery and antisemitism.

THE TRANSITIVITY PROJECT OF THE ESV

Since the late 1970s, the most popular English Bible translation among evangelicals (second only to the King James Version [KJV]) has been, and continues to be, the NIV (American Bible Society 2017; Goff et al. 2017). In 1997, Susan Olasky (1997) of *WORLD* magazine broke a story that the NIV's publisher, Zondervan, was planning on publishing a revision of the NIV that adopted "gender-neutral" language practices similar to those of the NRSV. Many evangelical leaders were outraged that Zondervan would seemingly capitulate to "feminism" and "political correctness" (Carson 1998). Despite efforts from Zondervan executives and the NIV translation committee to calm the outcry, Wayne Grudem, then President of the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, was unsatisfied and believed the best course of action would be for complementarian evangelicals to publish their own Bible that they could protect from the threat of feminist ideology and other liberal threats to conservative Christian theology (Bayly 1999). Rather than re-translate the entire Old and New Testament, Grudem and the president of the evangelical publisher Crossway contacted the National Council of Churches, who had published the "too liberal" RSV about procuring their copyright. With Grudem as its general editor, the ESV would update the language of the 1971 edition of the RSV and implement whatever changes the editorial team deemed "necessary to rid it of de-Christianing translation choices" (Bayly 1999).

Since its inception, the fundamental goal of the ESV editorial team was to establish transitivity (that is, *a seemingly natural interpretive congruence or connection*) between their translation and tenets of the complementarian, biblicist, and trinitarian interpretive tradition. Grudem stated this almost explicitly in a 2016 interview with *WORLD* magazine (Smith 2016). Summarizing the ESV's revisions to the RSV, Grudem explained: "We took out all the traces of liberalism and updated the RSV. We changed about 8 percent of the text or about 60,000 words. 'Wouldst' went to 'would' and 'couldst' went to 'could' and some things like that" (Smith

2016). The fact that Grudem emphasizes how the ESV targeted the "liberalism" of the RSV is critical to note. As Thuesen (1999) documented, biblicist evangelicals initially rejected the "liberal" RSV because it rendered proof-texts in such a way that they no longer substantiated Christotelic or Messianic readings of the Old Testament.

In his *WORLD* interview, Grudem cited numerous RSV passages that were targeted for immediate revision in the ESV. Most famously, Isaiah 7:14 was long-held as a key proof-text foretelling Jesus' virgin birth. Breaking from the KJV, the 1952 RSV translated the Hebrew word *alma* (literally "young woman") to read "young woman," rather than "virgin." The ESV re-translated this as "virgin" to better support a Messianic reading of Isaiah 7:14 as well as Christotelic continuity between the Old and New Testaments. The ESV also re-introduced theological terminology in the New Testament that had formerly substantiated a conservative evangelical view of Christ's atonement for sin. Evangelical groups and leaders had long felt the "liberal" RSV translators *intentionally* purged the Bible of such terminology. Grudem explained:

> In the New Testament, the word "propitiation," which was in four key texts that talk about Christ's death for us, was removed from the Revised Standard Version because many of the translators didn't believe that God had individual, personal wrath against people's sin. Propitiation was a word that meant Jesus' death bore the wrath of God against sin and paid the penalty for us. They had changed it to a word that was kind of neutral, called expiation. That upset many evangelicals as well. (Smith 2016)

Grudem here attributes the change not to the RSV translators' commitment to lexical accuracy but to their liberalism, specifically their lack of faith in orthodox soteriological doctrines. The ESV thus re-translated those passages to bring back the word "propitiation" and thus better establish transitivity between the text and core theological doctrines involving Christ's death appeasing God's anger against sin.

Beyond revisions to re-substantiate biblicist and trinitarian interpretations of traditional proof-texts, my recent analysis documents how the ESV editorial team modified key gender passages relating to women's roles in marriage and in the church, each in the direction of supporting more complementarian interpretations (Perry 2020). For example, where the RSV translated the Greek word *diaconos* in Romans 16:1 as "deaconess" in reference to Phoebe, the ESV changed this to "servant." Similarly, where the RSV had translated *gunaikas* (wives or women) in 1 Timothy 3:11 as "women," leaving open the possibility that women could also be included in Paul's instructions to deacons, the ESV added an English plural

possessive pronoun (where there was none in Greek) and changed the translation to "their wives." This revision would steer readers toward the interpretation that Paul was referring to male deacon's wives, not women who were also deacons. Elsewhere, I show that, in Ephesians 5:21–22, where the RSV had begun the famous passage about wives and husbands with vs. 21, "Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ," the ESV appended that verse to a previous paragraph and thus began a completely new section (with its own heading) with vs. 22, "Wives submit to your husbands. . . ." The interpretive implications of this change were quite consequential. If one were to read the RSV verses, one would get the impression that the Christian household was to be characterized by mutual submission. If one reads the same ESV verses, one is likely to conclude Christian marriages are characterized by *only* wives submitting while husbands lead and nurture.

In revising the RSV along these lines, the ESV editorial team was able to establish transitivity between their text and complementarian/biblicist interpretive traditions, thus making it highly appealing to that target audience. Consequently, the ESV has become one of the fastest growing Bible translations among evangelicals since its initial publication in 2001 (Perry 2020; Perry and Grubbs 2020). Yet, consistent with the American evangelical subcultural commitment to being "engaged" as well as "orthodox" (Smith 1998), the ESV editorial team has systematically (though subtly) sought to close off the possibility of certain negative interpretations that have been the occasion for outsiders' offense.

THE INTRANSITIVITY PROJECT OF THE ESV

In the following sections, I document how the ESV editorial team has progressively sought to establish intransitivity (*an apparent incongruence between the text and various undesirable interpretations*) regarding the Bible's language related to "slaves" and "the Jews."

First, comparing the 1971 RSV text with successive revisions of the 2001/2007 ESV in 2011 and 2016, I document how the ESV has utilized strategies of (1) progressively retranslating lexically ambiguous terms ('*ebed* in the Old Testament and *doulos* in the New Testament) and (2) selectively assigning footnotes to obviate the Bible's ostensible promotion of slavery and any negative historical connotations associated with it. Indeed, in numerous cases, they have sought to remove slave language entirely.

Second, comparing the 2001/2007 editions of the ESV with subsequent editions in 2011 and 2016, I document how the ESV began to selectively

assign footnotes to its literal translations of *hoi Ioudaioi* ("the Jews") to explain that the New Testament writers meant specific Jewish leaders rather than all Jews as a group, thus seeking to avoid the charge of antisemitism.

The first edition of the ESV in 2001 made some immediate changes to the 1971 RSV text regarding slave language, though these were all left unexplained. In future editions of the ESV—particularly in 2011 and again in 2016—the intransitivity project regarding slavery would become more explicit. For the sake of organization, I will divide key revisions into those in the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Israelite Instructions Regarding the ʿebedim *in the Old Testament*

In the initial 2001 edition of the ESV, the editorial team made immediate and unannounced changes to roughly one-quarter of the Old Testament slave references in the 1971 RSV. Whereas the RSV translated *ʿebed* or its plural *ʿebedim* as "slave" or "slaves" over eighty times, the 2001 ESV changed over twenty of these instances to "servant(s)" or some circumlocution[8] (see Genesis 9:25 (2x), 26, 27; 15:13; 20:14; 43:18; 44:9 (2x), 10, 16 (2x), 17; 47:19, 21, 25; 49:15; Joshua 9:23; 16:10; 1 Kings 2:39 (2x), 40 (2x); Proverbs 17:2). Whereas the preface to the 2001 ESV Bible was explicit about how it would translate gendered language and follow an "essentially literal" approach to translation, it gave no reason for why it would render certain instances of *ʿebed*(*im*) as "servant(s)" instead of the earlier "slave(s)" used by the RSV. What is clear, however, is that the ESV editorial team *never* retranslated in the opposite direction; that is, where the RSV uses "servant(s)," the ESV editors never retranslate this as "slave(s)."

The 2007 revision of the ESV made no changes from the 2001 edition regarding slave language. However, in 2011, the ESV editorial team modified their preface, telegraphing and explaining several revisions that would show up in the new ESV edition. In the section entitled, "The Translation of Specialized Terms" in the preface, the ESV editors wrote:

> A particular difficulty is presented when words in biblical Hebrew and Greek refer to ancient practices and institutions that do not correspond directly to those in the modern world. Such is the case in the translation of *ʿebed* (Hebrew) and *doulos* (Greek), terms which are often rendered "slave." These terms, however actually cover a range of relationships that

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[8]As an example of a circumlocution, in Joshua 16:10, the author recounts how the Israelites had failed to exterminate all of the Canaanites from the Promised Land, but instead subjected them to forced labor as *ʿebed* ("slaves" in the RSV). The 2001 ESV changes the more literal RSV translation of "slaves" to simply say the Canaanites were subjected "to forced labor," leaving *ʿebed* essentially untranslated.

require a range of renderings—either "slave," "bondservant," or "servant"—depending on the context. (2011, 21)

This introduction to the challenge of how to best translate *'ebed* or *doulos* is a necessary signaling step for a Bible marketed toward biblicist Protestants. The legitimacy of the ESV to this consumer subculture rests on its "faithfulness," "accuracy," and "essentially literal" correspondence to the original languages. Consequently, the ESV editorial team cannot introduce the problem as one of "cultural sensitivity" or "political correctness," but a lexical problem in which the semantic range of certain Hebrew and Greek words includes relationships that English equivalents such as "slave" cannot quite capture. Thus, the editors assert that such terms might need to be translated differently (slave, bondservant, or servant) depending on context.

Having signaled their primary priority to faithfulness and accuracy as translators, the ESV editorial team then introduces the external, cultural problem. They write:

Further, the word "slave" currently carries associations with the often brutal and dehumanizing institution of slavery in nineteenth-century America. For *this* reason, the ESV translation of the words *'ebed* and *doulos* has been undertaken with particular attention to their meaning in each specific context." (emphasis added; 2011, 21)

Here it becomes clearer that the ESV editorial team wants to ensure that readers do not consciously or unconsciously associate the Bible's references and teachings regarding *'ebed* and *doulos* with the "brutal and dehumanizing" chattel slavery of the antebellum American South. Thus, we can conclude any modifications to slave language in either the Old or New Testaments of the ESV are made with the goal of establishing intransivity, that is, interpretive incongruence between the text and potentially negative connotations.

Though the majority of revisions in service of this project would be seen in the New Testament, the 2011 edition introduced several key revisions to the Old Testament as well. Table 1 presents a comparison between the 2001/2007 ESV text and that of the 2011/2016 text on seven key verses. Elsewhere throughout the Old Testament, the ESV continues to use the term "slaves" in various instances without explanation. But as Table 1 shows, in 2011 the ESV editorial team began to introduce footnotes where the Israelites were given explicit instructions about *'ebedim*. For example, in Exodus 21, the Israelites are given explicit instructions about the buying, breeding, selling, and releasing of *'ebedim*. The terminology of

Table 1. Introduction of Footnotes to Offer Alternate Translations for Slave Terms

Reference	2001/2007 ESV	2011/2016 ESV
Exodus 12:44	but every slave that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him.	but every slave* that is bought for money may eat of it after you have circumcised him. * Or *servant*; the Hebrew term *'ebed* designates a range of social and economic roles (see Preface)
Exodus 21:2	When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing.	When you buy a Hebrew slave,* he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. * Or *servant*; the Hebrew term *'ebed* designates a range of social and economic roles; also verses 5, 6, 7, 20, 21, 26, 27, 32 (see Preface)
Leviticus 22:11	but if a priest buys a slave as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food.	but if a priest buys a slave* as his property for money, the slave may eat of it, and anyone born in his house may eat of his food. * Or *servant*; twice in this verse
Leviticus 25:6	The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you,	The Sabbath of the land shall provide food for you, for yourself and for your male and female slaves* and for your hired worker and the sojourner who lives with you, * Or *servants*
Deuteronomy 23:15	"You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you.	"You shall not give up to his master a slave* who has escaped from his master to you. * Or *servant*; the Hebrew term *'ebed* designates a range of social and economic roles (see Preface)
Isaiah 14:2	And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the Lᴏʀᴅ's land as male and female slaves. They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them.	And the peoples will take them and bring them to their place, and the house of Israel will possess them in the Lᴏʀᴅ's land as male and female slaves.* They will take captive those who were their captors, and rule over those who oppressed them. * Or *servants*

exchanges is redolent of American chattel slavery. Israelite masters would purchase slaves and even give wives to their slaves for breeding purposes (21:4). Further, the master would own the slave's wife and children such

that he could maintain ownership over them even when the male slave was released (21:4). Unsurprisingly, then, when the term *'ebed* is first used in Exodus 21:2, the 2011 edition appends a footnote that will cover all references to *'ebed* throughout the entire chapter, stating:

> * Or *servant*; the Hebrew term *'ebed* designates a range of social and economic roles; also verses 5, 6, 7, 20, 21, 26, 27, 32 (see Preface)

Although the context quite clearly demands that *'ebed* be translated "slave," the effect of the footnote pointing to a softer, less permanent term "servant," as well as referring to the Preface where readers are reminded about the incongruence between biblical slavery and American slavery, is ultimately intended to subtly head off uncharitable interpretations of Exodus 21.

A similar move is made in Deuteronomy 23. Moses is reciting a litany of instructions to the Israelites regarding hygiene, social relationships, and property. In verse 15, Moses states aphoristically, "You shall not give up to his master a slave who has escaped from his master to you." Whereas the 2001/2007 ESV left this verse uninflected, the 2011 edition appended a footnote to "slave" stating a formula similar to the one provided above:

> * Or *servant*; the Hebrew term *'ebed* designates a range of social and economic roles (see Preface)

Given that runaway slaves are a common theme in narratives of chattel slavery in the antebellum American South (see Carbado and Weise 2012), the ESV's addition of "servant" as a possible translation and pointing to the preface where the editors explicitly state the discontinuity between the biblical *'ebed* and American slavery is almost certainly intended to disrupt any connection between the two and evoke a different cultural context.

Even taken together, the initial (unannounced) 2001 replacement of "slave(s)" with "servant(s)" in many instances throughout the Old Testament and the strategic 2011 introduction of footnotes to soften slave language were still rather subtle ways to establish intransitivity between the biblical text and the Bible's ostensible support of slavery. The ESV's changes to the New Testament would be far more explicit.

From "Slaves" to "Bondservants"

The term *doulos* is used in the New Testament well over 100 times, being variously translated "slave" or "servant" in the 1971 RSV. Unlike the initial 2001 text of the ESV in the Old Testament, the New Testament

translators of the 2001 ESV did not change any "slave" references in the actual text but instead introduced numerous footnotes at strategic locations. Table 2 presents the 1971 RSV reading of key "slave" passages and subsequent revisions in the ESV at 2001/2007, 2011, and most recently in 2016. We see in the 2001 ESV text that footnotes are added to the word "slave," indicating that alternative translations include "servant" or "bondservant." Neither of these terms is explained anywhere in the original preface or in the footnotes provided by the 2001 ESV team.

Although these initial revisions are subtle, it is more important to note *which* New Testament references to slavery merited footnotes. The ESV certainly does not provide footnotes with alternatives of "servant" or "bondservants" for every time the RSV translated *doulos* as "slave." Rather, each of the 2001/2007 passages with footnotes are those in which Christians are being instructed about "slaves" as a group and either slaves or slave-owners are being addressed directly (1 Corinthians 7:21–23; Ephesians 6:5–8; Colossians 3:22; Colossians 4:1; 1 Timothy 6:1; Titus 2:9; Philemon vv. 15–16). The footnotes are thus clearly strategic. Though the ESV editorial team had not explained or telegraphed their intention at this point, the fact that strategic references to *doulos/douloi* are alone given possible alternate readings with softer glosses such as "servant," or even specialized Bible jargon like "bondservant," suggests that the obvious goal was to ensure readers were aware that the relationships that Paul is describing were either not as severe as "slavery" (servants) or a different sort of relationship altogether (bondservants).

In the 2011 edition, following the ESV's clear prefatory statement about the need to distinguish biblical slave/servant relationships from slave relationships in the antebellum South, Table 2 shows that the ESV translators have now switched the original reading of "slave" with the former footnote alternative of "bondservant." Thus, Paul no longer tells "slaves" to stay in slavery (1 Corinthians 7:21–23) or submit to their masters (Ephesians 6:5–8). He is speaking about "bondservants." The term "slave" is now relegated to the footnote as a possible translation option. For example, appended to the term "bondservant" in 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:9, we see identical footnotes stating:

> * Or *slaves* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface)

The reference to the Preface is not only important as an explanation of why *doulos* here has alternate renderings. Though the term "bondservant" was initially left unexplained as a footnote option in the 2001/2007 ESV

Table 2. Progressive Removal of New Testament Slave References from the 1971 RSV to the 2016 ESV

Reference	RSV 1971	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011	ESV 2016
1 Corinthians 7:21-23	21 Were you a slave when called? Never mind. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.	21 Were you a slave* when called? Do not be concerned about it. But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity. 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a slave is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a slave of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men. * Greek *bondservant*; also twice in verse 22 and once in verse 23 (plural)	21 Were you a bondservant* when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants** of men. * Or *slave*; also twice in verse 22 (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface) ** Or *slaves* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface)	21 Were you a bondservant* when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.) 22 For he who was called in the Lord as a bondservant is a freedman of the Lord. Likewise he who was free when called is a bondservant of Christ. 23 You were bought with a price; do not become bondservants of men. * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; also verses 22 (twice), 23

Table 2. Continued

Reference	RSV 1971	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011	ESV 2016
Ephesians 6:5–8	[5] Slaves, be obedient to those who are your earthly masters, with fear and trembling, in singleness of heart, as to Christ; [6] not in the way of eye-service, as men-pleasers, but as servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to men, [8] knowing that whatever good any one does, he will receive the same again from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free.

* Or *slaves* | Slaves,* obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as servants** of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a slave or is free.

* Or *servants*; Greek *bondservants*; similarly verse 8

** Or *slaves*; Greek *bondservants* | Bondservants,* obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant** or is free.

* Or *slaves*, also verse 6 (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface) Greek word *doulos*, see Preface) also verse 6

** Or *slave* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface) | Bondservants,* obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

* For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface; also verse 6; likewise for *bondservant* in verse 8 |

Table 2. Continued

Reference	RSV 1971	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011	ESV 2016
Colossians 3:22	Slaves, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing the Lord.	Slaves,* obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. * Or *Servants*; Greek *Bondservants*	Bondservants,* obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. * Or *Slaves*; also 4:1 (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface)	Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. (Footnote referencing *doulos* is attached to 3:11 earlier)
Colossians 4:1	Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.	Masters, treat your slaves* justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. * Or *servants*; Greek *bondservants*	Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. (Footnote referencing *doulos* is attached to 3:22 earlier)	Masters, treat your bondservants* justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven. * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface
1 Timothy 6:1	Let all who are under the yoke of slavery regard their masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be defamed.	Let all who are under a yoke as slaves* regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. * Greek *bondservants*	Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants* regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. * Or *slaves* (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface)	Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants* regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface

Table 2. Continued

Reference	RSV 1971	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011	ESV 2016
Titus 2:9	Bid slaves to be submissive to their masters and to give satisfaction in every respect; they are not to be refractory	*Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative * Or servants; Greek bondservants	*Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative * Or Slaves (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word doulos, see Preface)	Bondservants* are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word doulos, see Preface
Philemon vv. 1516	15 Perhaps this is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back for ever, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother, especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.	15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a slave* but more than a slave, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. * Greek bondservant; twice in this verse	15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant* but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. * Or slave; twice in this verse (for the contextual rendering of the Greek word doulos, see Preface)	15 For this perhaps is why he was parted from you for a while, that you might have him back forever, 16 no longer as a bondservant* but more than a bondservant, as a beloved brother—especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word doulos, see Preface; twice in this verse

editions, the Preface now provides a description of what a "bondservant" is and when the ESV editors thought it most appropriate to use the term:

> In New Testament times, a *doulos* is often best described as a "bondservant"—that is, as someone bound to serve his master for a specific (usually lengthy) period of time, but also as someone who might nevertheless own property, achieve social advancement, and even be released or purchase his freedom. The ESV usage thus seeks to express the nuance of meaning in each context. Where absolute ownership by a master is in view (as in Romans 6), "slave" is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, "bondservant" is used (as in 1 Corinthians 7:21–24); where the context indicates a wide range of freedom (as in John 4:51), "servant" is preferred.

Having now changed *doulos* to "bondservant" in strategic verses throughout Paul's epistles, the ESV translation team has more concretely established intransivity by reducing the likelihood that readers will read Paul's instructions to *douloi* and conclude that the relationships Paul has in mind are anything like the immoral, dehumanizing institution in antebellum America. In fact, from the ESV editors' description, "bondservants" seem more like contracted labor: they can own property, advance socially, and eventually gain their freedom. Hardly the dehumanizing bondage we associate with chattel slavery.

In 2016, the ESV editors revised the text yet again, completing the intransitivity project. The last column of Table 2 shows that the text of the 2011 ESV is still the same: "bondservants" are still being addressed in Paul's instructions regarding slavery. The one key difference in 2016, however, is that the term "slaves" has been completely removed from the footnotes as an option. For example, the footnotes appended to "bondservant" in 1 Timothy 6:1 and Titus 2:9 now read:

> * For the contextual rendering of the Greek word *doulos*, see Preface

Readers of the 2016 ESV edition, in other words, are no longer made aware that "slave(s)" is even an option for translating *doulos/douloi* in these passages.

Thus the transitivity project regarding the New Testament's problematic slave language is completed: beginning in 2001 with footnotes pointing to softer alternative renderings, then in 2011 the softer renderings took the place of the original "slave" references, and by 2016 the slave references were removed completely. Subsequent readers of the ESV would have no idea that Paul instructed "slaves" to obey their masters or

that Christian masters could own "slaves." Rather, they will only know that "bondservants"—those whose service, according to the Preface, is temporary and even economically and socially profitable—are to be diligent workers for their (Christian) masters. Slave language has been effectively whitewashed.

For Fear of "the Jews"

New Testament writers, and most especially the writer of John's Gospel, often use the Greek word *hoi Ioudaioi* (literally "Jews" or "the Jews") when referring to a group of individuals who were plotting against and persecuting Jesus and his followers. Historically, the most popular English Bible translations such as the KJV, RSV, New American Standard Bible, and even the 1984 NIV rendered *hoi Ioudaioi* literally as "the Jews," leading to readings that portray this group in a decidedly negative light. For example, in John 7:1, the RSV reads: "After this Jesus went about in Galilee; he would not go about in Judea, because the Jews sought to kill him." Or in 1 Thessalonians 2:14–15, Paul writes, "You suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all men." Reading these texts, one could easily get the impression that "the Jews" are a misanthropic group who plotted and carried out murder against Jesus and persecuted his followers. In other words, such translations might carry antisemitic implications.

Aware of this, a number of contemporary translations or revisions began to provide more idiomatic and contextualized renderings of *hoi Ioudaioi* to establish intransitivity between the English text and the perception of antisemitism. For example, whereas the 1984 NIV translated *hoi Ioudaioi* as "the Jews," in their 2005 revision they began to translate *hoi Ioudaioi* as "Jewish leaders" (e.g., John 7:1, 11), "Jewish officials" (e.g., John 18:12), just "the leaders" (John 7:13), or even leaving it untranslated entirely (e.g., John 9:18). Such revisions are obviously made with the goal of mitigating the possibility of antisemitic interpretations from a strictly literal translation. Other translations such as the idiomatic 1996 New Living Translation or even the more literal 2005 New English Translation have also followed this pattern.

The editors of the ESV, however, have chosen to adopt a different approach to maintain a balance between transitivity to their biblicist target audience and intransitivity between the text and antisemitic interpretations. On the one hand, the ESV has been fashioned and marketed as an "essentially literal" translation that aims to provide corresponding English words for terms in the original languages and formally rejects the

idea of adjusting texts for the sake of "political correctness." Indeed, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Grudem, the general editor of the ESV, critiqued Bibles that re-translated *hoi Ioudaioi* specifically as an example of translators capitulating to cultural pressure (e.g., Grudem 1997, 26; Poythress and Grudem 2004, 102–3).[9] Yet it is clear that over time the ESV editors have become more uncomfortable with the idea of leaving negative characterizations of "the Jews" without qualification in the text itself. Thus, they eventually opted to introduce qualifying footnotes. As with New Testament references to *douloi*, the footnotes for *hoi Ioudaioi* do not appear everywhere but have been strategically introduced wherever antisemitic interpretations would be most probable in context.

The first column in Table 3 shows a series of texts in the 2001/2007 editions of the ESV where *hoi Ioudaioi* is simply rendered "the Jews." The translations are nearly identical to the earlier 1971 RSV. Upon reading through the list, it is clear how readers could draw antisemitic conclusions from such texts. "The Jews" are portrayed as jealous, hypocritical, spiritually reprobate, and doggedly determined to kill Jesus and persecute his followers. In 2011, however, the ESV editorial board began to annotate certain instances of "the Jews" in these texts, often including references to other usages as well to cover the references strategically. For example, John 18:12 reads "the officers of the Jews* arrested Jesus and bound him." The footnote states:

> * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 14, 31, 36, 38

This footnote thus also qualifies references to "the Jews" in four other verses in this chapter where the *hoi Ioudaioi* are negotiating with Pilate to have Jesus killed. Similarly, in Acts 9:23, we read "When many days had passed, the Jews* plotted to kill [Paul]." The footnote explains:

> * The Greek word *Ioudaioi* refers specifically here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith in that time

Thus, the ESV editorial team is able to maintain their commitment to "essentially literal" translation by translating *hoi Ioudaioi* as "the Jews" while also qualifying for readers that these references are "probably"

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[9]In fact, in a public debate regarding the 2005 Today's NIV, Grudem said that their decision to regularly retranslate *Ioudaioi* as "the Jewish leaders" was "not in accordance with sound translation principles and unfair to the Greek text," "illegitimate," and "with no warrant in the text." See Leman (2002).

Table 3. Introduction of Footnotes to Explain Negative References to "the Jews"

Reference	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011, 2016
John 5:10	So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed."	So the Jews* said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." * The Greek word *Ioudaioi* refers specifically here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed Jesus in that time; also verses 15, 16, 18
John 7:1	After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews were seeking to kill him.	After this Jesus went about in Galilee. He would not go about in Judea, because the Jews* were seeking to kill him. * Or Judeans; Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time
John 9:18	The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight	The Jews* did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, until they called the parents of the man who had received his sight * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 22
John 18:12	So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him.	So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews* arrested Jesus and bound him. * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 14, 31, 36, 38
John 19:7	The Jews answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God."	The Jews* answered him, "We have a law, and according to that law he ought to die because he has made himself the Son of God." * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 12, 14, 31, 38
John 20:19	On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."	On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being locked where the disciples were for fear of the Jews,* Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time
Acts 9:23	When many days had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,	When many days had passed, the Jews* plotted to kill him, * The Greek word *Ioudaioi* refers specifically here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith in that time

Table 3. Continued

Reference	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011, 2016
Acts 17:5	But the Jews were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd.	But the Jews* were jealous, and taking some wicked men of the rabble, they formed a mob, set the city in an uproar, and attacked the house of Jason, seeking to bring them out to the crowd. * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 13
Acts 18:12	But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal,	But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews* made a united attack on Paul and brought him before the tribunal, * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verses 14 (twice), 28
Acts 20:3	There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia.	There he spent three months, and when a plot was made against him by the Jews* as he was about to set sail for Syria, he decided to return through Macedonia. * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 19
Acts 21:11	And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"	And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews* at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'" * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time
1 Thess. 2:14	For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,	For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews,* * The Greek word *Ioudaioi* can refer to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, who opposed the Christian faith in that time

referring to a specific group of leaders who were persecuting Jesus and his followers.

Although the majority of such alterations were made in the 2011 revisions, we can also observe the editorial team revisiting these particular passages and at times changing their minds about the most strategic places to put qualifying footnotes regarding "the Jews." For example, Table 4 shows the ESV text for Acts 13:45 and 13:50 in 2001/2007, in 2011, and in 2016.

Table 4. Movement of Footnotes Explaining Negative References to "the Jews"

Reference	ESV 2001, 2007	ESV 2011	ESV 2016
Acts 13:45	But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.	But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him.	But when the Jews* saw the crowds, they were filled with jealousy and began to contradict what was spoken by Paul, reviling him. * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 50
Acts 13:50	But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.	But the Jews* incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district. * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time	But the Jews incited the devout women of high standing and the leading men of the city, stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and drove them out of their district.

In 2001/2007, the ESV text is unaugmented and simply refers to "the Jews" in both 13:45 and 13:50. In 2011, the ESV editorial team introduces a footnote to 13:50 where "the Jews" incited a riot against Paul and Barnabas. However, it is clear that by 2016, the ESV editorial team had noticed that "the Jews" in Acts 13:45 are also shown to be "filled with jealousy" at Paul's large crowds and begin to oppose him publicly. Consequently they repositioned the footnote five verses earlier in order to qualify the earlier potentially problematic verse, leaving the footnote:

> * Greek *Ioudaioi* probably refers here to Jewish religious leaders, and others under their influence, in that time; also verse 50

Thus, although they have never formally announced their intention to remove potentially antisemitic language from their text (which is unsurprising considering Grudem's repeated criticism of such revisions) and

they maintain the literal translation "the Jews" throughout their text, the ESV editorial team can clearly be observed revisiting and revising these texts in order to establish intransitivity or interpretive incongruence between the text and antisemitic interpretations.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Figure 1 illustrates how the ESV revisions from the 1971 RSV were made in the service of both transitivity and intransitivity to appeal to both complementarian/biblicist Christians and outsiders, respectively. The RSV contained language that was rejected or offensive to different audiences. On the one hand, the RSV translation team's commitment to lexical accuracy and literalism led them to remove terms and phrases that had previously established transitivity between the text and evangelical doctrines regarding Christology, biblical inerrancy, and complementarianism. This led many conservative evangelicals to reject it as liberal and unreliable. One the other hand, those same commitments led the RSV to translate slave language and references to "the Jews" quite literally, which in subsequent years has opened the biblical text up to charges of promoting slavery and antisemitism (Harris 2004; Lange et al. 2018).

As Figure 1 shows, the ESV's iterative modifications sought to rectify both of these problems. In service of establishing transitivity for complementarian evangelical audiences, the ESV systematically modified key gender passages to establish interpretive congruence between
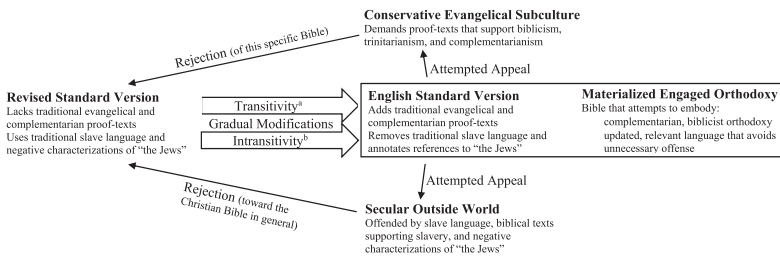

Figure 1. Modifications from the 1971 Revised Standard Version to the 2016 English Standard Version in Order to Establish Transitivity and Intransitivity Leading to a Materialized Engaged Orthodoxy.
[a]Transitivity refers to a seemingly natural interpretive congruence or connection between a text and a preferred set of beliefs. ESV editors modified language from the 1971 RSV to establish transitivity between their text and beliefs regarding gender roles, the Trinity, and the Bible.
[b]Intransitivity refers to an apparent incongruence between a biblical text and an undesirable interpretation. ESV editors modified language from the 1971 RSV and in subsequent editions of the ESV to establish intransitivity between the text and negative interpretations that the Bible's promotes slavery and antisemitism.

the text and complementarian beliefs (Perry 2020), and they revised key Christological and soteriological passages in the Old and New Testaments to establish transitivity between the text and traditional biblicist doctrines. And in the service of establishing intransitivity for outside audiences, the ESV systematically retranslated references to *ʿebed* or *doulos* throughout the Old and New Testaments and also provided footnotes qualifying more literal translations of "slave" throughout the Bible as well as references to "the Jews" in the New Testament. Thus, the ESV editorial team simultaneously materialized "engaged orthodoxy" in their Bible translation, fashioning a "faithful" text that they could market to complementarian, biblicist Christians while also obviating charges of regressive social teaching in the Bible from outsiders.

This study makes a number of important contributions to the study of religion generally as well as to our understanding of both "the Bible" and biblicist Christianity. Broadening out from this particular case, this study elucidates how a particularly sectarian religious subculture has sought to resolve the fundamental tension religious communities experience within pluralistic societies, namely, how to reinforce their own core identities and ideals while also negotiating public relations with outsiders. I have proposed that such communities seek to accomplish the latter task by working to establish intransitivity in their text. Though applied to the case of biblicist Christians, the concept has utility for the examination of other religious groups as well. Most obviously, many Jewish and Muslim communities emphasize the transitive nature of their faith-text relationship similar to that of biblicist Protestantism. And both Muslim and Jewish communities have produced English translations of the Qurʾan or Tanakh, respectively, that favored sectarian or political interpretations also reflecting the "transitivity project" I document in the ESV (Alter 2019; Mohammed 2005). Yet, although the "sectarian" or "ideological" bias of translations is often observed (Mohaghegh and Pirnajmuddin 2013; Robinson 1997), underexplored is how such communities compromise and adjust their texts to cut off negative social interpretations. Deploying the concepts used here, future research, for example, could systematically compare English translations (or revisions of older translations) of the Qurʾan following September 11, 2001, in order to observe how Muslim translators might seek to avoid traditional glosses that may allow oppositional readers to construe Islamic teaching as fundamentally violent (Mohammed 2005).

Future studies could also apply the conceptual framework used here to consider the dynamism of religious texts more generally. I recently argued that "the Bible" has *never* been a stable or uniform text, but rather "the Bible," and English Bibles in particular, are multiform (there are nontrivial

differences across Bibles) and their contents are dynamic and contested (Perry 2020). My analysis here has demonstrated that much of this dynamism—and the subsequent proliferation of forms—comes in the service of either transitivity or intransitivity, and both modifications are enlisted in the service of resolving fundamental tensions for religious communities confronted with changing societal pressures. Yet, these modifications have been carried out exclusively by community insiders. In considering other sources of dynamism for non-Christian religions, a comparison of English translations of the Qur'an would provide another angle for analysis since, unlike the English Bible, the Qur'an has often been translated by Western outsiders who translated with bias that sought to highlight the Qur'an's (and thus Islam's) supposedly violent and lascivious teachings (Mohammed 2005). Researchers could thus consider how non-Muslim translators, seeking to cast Islam in a negative light, have sought to establish transitivity between the text and negative social interpretations (conveying Islam as violent) while establishing intransitivity between the text and more socially approved interpretations (conveying that Islam teaches pro-social values).

Speaking to Bibles specifically, growing pluralism within the United States creates increasing internal *and* external pressure for Bible publishers and translation teams to simultaneously accomplish both transitivity and intransitivity. Stated in reverse, there is pressure not to err on either evaluation—judged unfaithful to community sensibilities or too offensive to the sensibilities of the broader culture. Although this analysis has focused on the ESV as one of the most popular contemporary Bible translations in the United States, other contemporary evangelical translations could be observed as navigating a similar tension between transitivity and intransitivity, some taking a slightly different approach (Perry and Grubbs 2020; Perry and McElroy 2020). But ultimately, a more comprehensive analysis of societal pressures influencing the modification and dissemination of sacred texts must include other pressures not considered here. Due to data limitations and space, I have left unexplored the role that market pressures have in influencing Bible publishers and how Bible publishers may either apply pressure to translation teams or work in concert with translation teams to produce a product that can be marketed to the broadest possible audience. Daniel Vaca's recent landmark work on the evangelical publishing industry—which has long been heavily influenced by Bible sales—contextualizes how monetary issues might also drive some of the modifications that appear in evangelical Bibles over time (2019). Although the birth of the ESV was ideological in nature, I do not wish to imply that market forces play no role at all in its subsequent development and reception. Future studies could incorporate sales data as

well as interviews with executives at firms such as Crossway, Zondervan, Thomas Nelson, and Tyndale to provide more comprehensive analyses of how these market pressures work together with the theological and social pressures described here.

An additional perspective left unexplored here is the pedagogical impulse of biblicist Protestants and its connection to Scripture. In his discussion of Bible culture in early American history, Seth Perry (2018) deploys a pedagogical focus, emphasizing how mediators (translators, publishers, preachers) are fundamentally motivated to teach. Though the ESV could certainly be analyzed from this perspective as well, my focus on the transitivity/intransitivity dynamic underscores the role not just of "the asymmetrical apportioning of relevant knowledge" (Perry 2018, 22), but of the asymmetrical apportioning of social and religious influence that Scriptural modifications aim to reproduce. This, again, is where the concepts developed in this study could be extended to consider the pedagogical and public relations pressures shaping the sacred texts of non-Christian religions.

Finally, my analysis also elaborates how American evangelicals' project of "engaged orthodoxy" (Smith 1998) is instantiated materially in the Bible itself. Whereas Smith's initial description of the concept qualified orthodox "engagement" as something done *interpersonally*, with the goal of impacting "the intellectual, cultural, social, and political life of the nation" (1998, 10), the evangelical project of simultaneously influencing the outside world with the gospel and the Bible while remaining "fully committed to maintaining and promoting confidently traditional, orthodox Protestant theology and belief" (1998, 10) is not only clearly seen in the case of the ESV's development but could potentially serve as paradigmatic example of the evangelical project. That is to say, within the ESV, an increasingly popular Bible translation, conservative Christians read an example of faithful commitment to evangelical biblicism and complementarian theology in combination with a gradual, subtle updating of the message for a changing world. Evangelicals are thus able to hold a Bible that is simultaneously celebrated for remaining "faithful" to core doctrines while strategically engaging with the surrounding culture itself. Yet, as I have argued above (and as Smith 1998 also recognized), all religious groups within pluralistic societies are confronted with the challenge of reinforcing core identities and ideals within the community (orthodoxy) while negotiating public relations with outsiders (engaged). Thus, extending an analysis of textual modifications in the service of transitivity, intransitivity, and, ultimately, a form of engaged orthodoxy could be fruitfully applied to many other religions in increasingly pluralistic contexts.

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