
THE
LIVING
BIBLE

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Those who translate the Holy Scriptures need to approach their solemn task with a deep reverence for the majesty and holiness of their Divine Author, saying with the Psalmist, "My heart standeth in awe of Thy Word". The Eternal God, the Lord of Heaven and earth, graciously makes known to us the mystery of His will, and this revelation is given to us, "not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth". It is therefore of the greatest importance that a translation should be accurate and complete, as well as intelligible, and that it should be expressed in the receptor language in a manner appropriate to the Divine Author, appropriate to the inspired writer, and appropriate to the subject matter. In many respects the Living Bible falls far short of these standards, and the statement on the cover of the 1973 paper-back edition, printed in England, that "it makes the Bible read like today's newspaper", although quite true, is hardly a commendation.

The translator

In an interview with Mr. J. L. Fear published in "Evangelism Today" in December 1972 the translator, Mr. K. N. Taylor, introduces his work as "a *paraphrase*—a thought for thought *translation*", in which "we take the original thought and convert it into the language of today". In this way, he said, "we can be much more accurate than the verbal translation . . . Once you get the real meaning of the Scriptures, they are life-transforming . . . I felt such a thrill at my own privilege of stripping away some of the verbiage . . . being a co-worker with God in that respect . . . I flipped open my Bible and began to experiment with this new method of translation". In the course of the interview Mr. Taylor mentioned that Dr. Billy Graham was giving away the entire Living Bible on television, and had printed six million copies for this purpose. The reviewer does not question the motives or the sincerity of the translator, and the following paragraphs are concerned only with the character and quality of his work, which is now being thrust upon English readers and hearers in many parts of the world.

Inappropriate language

In *Isaiah 55* the LORD declares, "My thoughts are not your thoughts . . . for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts". Particular care must therefore be exercised by one who attempts to take the *original thought* and convert it into the language of today. How does the Living Bible express the original thought of the LORD of Hosts in *Isaiah 5.14*? "Hell is licking its chops in anticipation of this delicious morsel, Jerusalem". In the eleventh verse of the same chapter in the American edition there is an expression which to an English reader would seem extremely vulgar. The substitution of "drunken layabouts" in the British edition, though colloquial, is less offensive. There are several similar instances scattered throughout the

translation. In many passages “the language of today” seems to be synonymous with the lowest forms of colloquial speech. The examples which follow are self-condemned and need no comment:—

Matthew 9.2—Cheer up son! *Matt. 11.19*—You complain that I . . . hang around with the worst sort of sinners. *Matt. 24.4*—Don’t let anyone fool you. *Mark 2.16*—How can he stand it, to eat with such scum? *Mk. 10.50*—Bartimaeus yanked off his old coat (American edition). *Mk. 12.17*—They scratched their heads in bafflement. *Luke 10.40*—Martha was the jittery type. *John 11.49*—You stupid idiots. *2 Thess. 3.7*—You never saw us loafing. *James 1.4*—Don’t try to squirm out of your problems. (The “original thought” here is the translator’s. There is no authority for these words in the Greek.) *1 John 1.8*—We are only fooling ourselves. *Jude 16*—These men are constant grippers (“moaners” in the British edition) . . . Loud-mouthed show-offs.

The Old Testament fares no better:—*Gen. 13.17*—God tells Abraham to “hike in all directions” (American edition). *Judges 7.20*—All yelling “For the Lord and for Gideon”. *Prov. 27.15*—“A cranky woman”. *Eccl. 5.3*—“Blabbermouth”. *Ezek. 36.5*—Grabbing my land with relish. *Ezek. 22.12*—Loan racketeers. *Isaiah 30.5*—He won’t help one little bit. *Isa. 41.24*—Anyone who chooses you needs to have his head examined. *Isa. 55.2*—Why pay for groceries that don’t do you any good? *Jonah 1.2*—Your wickedness . . . smells to highest heaven. *Nahum. 1.14*—How you stink with sin. In *Zechariah 8.9* the LORD of Hosts is made to say—Get on with the job and finish it; and in *9.7*—I will yank her idolatry out of her mouth. (Here the British edition has “wrench”).

Throughout the translation there are many expressions which are not offensive, but are too colloquial. Examples are found in *Genesis 29.5*—“Do you know a fellow there named Laban? *Gen. 37.8*—His cocky attitude. *Exodus 5.14*—The Israeli work-crew bosses. *Song of Solomon 1.9*—“What a lovely filly you are!” *Matt. 26.18*—Mr. So-and-So. *Acts 13.2*—The Spirit said, Dedicate Barnabas and Saul for a special job I have for them. *1 Thess. 2.9*—Night and day we toiled and sweated. (Not in the Greek). *Titus 3.15*—Please say “Hello” to all of the Christian friends there.

Some expressions are neither offensive nor colloquial, but are nevertheless inappropriate. *Luke 1.28*—Congratulations favoured lady. (The British edition has, “I salute you”). *1 Thess. 3.10*—To fill up any little cracks.

Wrong Interpretation

Instances of mistaken interpretation or exegesis are quite numerous, and the first is in the opening sentence of *Genesis*—“When God began creating . . .”. This rendering implies that the events described were not an absolute and primary work of creation. It is not supported by new documentary evidence, but represents the hardening of liberal scholarly opinion in favour of a rendering which

had been suggested from time to time over a period of many centuries, but was not considered of sufficient weight to warrant its adoption. It was suggested in a note in the *Variorum Bible* of 1888 by Drs. Cheyne, Driver and Sanday, and was adopted by the New English Bible and the Roman Catholic New American Bible in 1970. It appears also in a slightly different form in Byington's "Bible in Living English", which was completed in 1943 and published by Jehovah's Witnesses in 1972.

In *Ephesians 1.18* the Living Bible has—God has been made rich because we who are Christ's have been given to him—but the Scriptures here speak, not of God being made rich, but of God making His people rich, by giving them a glorious heavenly inheritance—as in *Acts 20.32* etc. In *Eph. 1.23*—The church which is his body, filled with himself—does not correctly interpret the Greek, where "the fulness" in verse 23 refers to "Him" in verse 22, and the meaning is—And gave Him (who is the fulness of Him that filleth all in all) to be head over all things to the Church. In *Eph. 2.5*—He gave us back our lives *again*—suggests that we had life, lost it, and received it *again*, whereas the Greek—quickeneth us together with—means precisely "To make us alive together with another", not *again*.

In *1 Thess. 3.5*—I was afraid that perhaps Satan had got the best of you—the Living Bible overlooks the emphasis in the Greek on *temptation*, "lest the tempter have tempted you". *Titus 1.2* speaks of "eternal life, which God that cannot lie promised before the world began". It does not say that this promise was made to men, and as it was made before the world began, it could not have been made to men, but was an expression of "the eternal purpose which He purposed in Christ". The Living Bible renders it—"which God promised *them*", and a vital truth is lost. In *Titus 2.11* in the Living Bible the tense of the verb is wrong, and the meaning is wrong, and the rendering is not the "dynamic equivalent" of the Greek, which says that "the grace of God which bringeth salvation *hath appeared* to all men". The Living Bible renders this—The free gift of eternal salvation is *now being offered* to everyone.

In *Matthew 2.23*—This fulfilled the prediction—does not convey the same sense as—That it might be fulfilled. The Greek first aorist passive subjunctive of PLEROO (PLEROTHE) is correctly rendered in the Authorised Version. The same weakness is seen in the Living Bible in *Matthew 4.14; 8.17* and other passages.

"He is looking for those with changed hearts" (*Romans 2.29*) does not represent the Greek text, but rather implies that God is searching for people who have brought about in their own hearts a change which God Himself alone is able to accomplish.

In *1 Peter 3.20* the Living Bible says that between His death and resurrection Christ preached to "the spirits of those who, long before in the days of Noah, had refused to listen". This is not the true meaning of the text, which is well expressed in the note in the Dutch Bible of 1637—"By *spirits* here are understood the souls of those persons to whom the Spirit or Godhead of Christ formerly caused repentance to be preached by Noah, namely, while they were yet alive . . . who were in *prison* or hell when Peter wrote his epistle".

“Dynamic equivalents” not provided

It is now often asserted that a translation should find in the receptor language the “dynamic equivalents” of the vocabulary, idioms and thought forms of the underlying Greek, or that the translation in “the language of today” must express *with like force* the expressions used by the inspired writer. The Living Bible falls lamentably short in this respect. “You must be a new and different person, holy and good. Clothe yourself with this new nature” (*Eph. 4.24*), is certainly not the dynamic equivalent of—“The new man is *created after God* (meaning according to His image) in righteousness”. The Living Bible over-emphasises the human side and diminishes the Divine.

“Doing those good, kind things which show that you are a child of God” (*Phil. 1.11*) is not the equivalent of “fruits of righteousness which are *by Jesus Christ*”. Again in *Phil. 1.28,29* the Living Bible makes no mention of *Christ*, and appears to refer to *God* in verse 28 as the antecedent, while the Greek and A.V. begin verse 29—“For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ . . .” Another important omission which makes the rendering much less than the dynamic equivalent is in *Phil. 2.8*, where the Living Bible mentions His humbling Himself and dying, but not His *obedience*, (A.V. “and became obedient unto death”). The Living Bible relegates His *obedience* to a footnote. In Hebrews 12.2, while *leader* may be an admissible equivalent of the word rendered “Author” in the A.V., *instructor* falls short of “finisher”, and the Living Bible drops *faith* completely.

“By washing away our sins” (*Titus 3.5*) provides no equivalent for the washing of *regeneration*. “New light” in *1 John 2.8* is not the equivalent of *true light*; and “You have a new life” (*1 Peter 1.23*) has not the same force as “being born again”. James writes of “the trying of your faith”, and the Living Bible—“when the way is rough”—does not convey the same meaning. (*James 1.3*).

Many examples could be given from the Old Testament, but three must suffice here. *Amos 5.1*—Sadly I sing this song (A.V. Hear this word); *2 Kings 21.6*—Manasseh was an evil man in *God’s opinion*—falls far short of “in the sight of the LORD”; *Psalms 34.20*—God even protects him from accidents (He keepeth all his bones, not one of them is broken).

Inaccurate renderings

In his interview the translator said, “We can be much more accurate than the verbal translation”, but in many places the Living Bible is highly inaccurate, as the following examples show:—*Matt. 12.35*—An evil hearted man is filled with venom (bringeth forth evil things). *Mark 7.20*—It is the thought life that pollutes (that which comes out of a man defiles). *Mark 10.26*—incredulous (astonished). *Luke 11.52*—You hide the truth (Greek—You have taken away the key of knowledge). *Eph. 1.1*—Christian friends (saints); loyal to the Lord (faithful in Christ Jesus). *Eph. 1.7*—By whom we are *saved* (in whom we have *redemption*). The Living Bible touches upon the *fact* of salvation, but the inspired Scripture speaks of the *method*. *Eph. 1.11*—We have become gifts to God that He delights in (in whom we have obtained an

inheritance). *Eph. 1.19*—How *incredibly* great (exceeding great, not exceeding belief, but exceeding understanding). *Col. 4.3*—That God will give us many chances to preach (open a door of utterance). *Col. 4.5*—Make the most of your chances (redeeming the time).

“These pastors” in *Titus 1.7* (“ministers” in the British edition) represent the Greek singular EPISCOPOS (overseer), not “elder” as stated in the Living Bible note. *Titus 1.5*—To appoint *pastors* (Greek PRESBUTEROI, elders). *Titus 2.10*—Our Saviour *and* God (the Greek has “God our Saviour”). In *1 John 1.1*, the Living Bible has — “I have seen . . . I have touched . . .” but the Greek has — “We have seen, etc.” In *1 John 2.4*, the Living Bible omits “and the truth is not in him”.

In some instances important doctrines are affected by what may appear to be small inaccuracies. An example is *1 Peter 1.9*—Your further reward for trusting Him *will be* the salvation of your souls. Here the Greek has the *present* participle, “*receiving*”, not the future tense as in the Living Bible. These lists could be considerably extended.

Unwarranted additions

The Living Bible professes to express the *original thought* in the language of today, but in many places it appears to invent original thoughts which have no place in the original text. The most striking example is in *John 1.17*—Moses gave us *only* the Law with its rigid demands and merciless justice, while Jesus Christ brought us loving forgiveness as well. Here much is added and much is lost. Moses did not *only* give us the Law, for Jesus said—“He wrote of Me”. The Law was not merciless, but spoke of “God showing mercy to thousands of them that love Him”. The Gospel says—“Grace and Truth came by Jesus Christ”; but in the Living Bible the *Truth* is lost, evidently in the process of “stripping away the verbiage”.

Other unwarranted additions are found in *Hosea 4.11*—Wine, women *and* song; *Hosea 12.1*—A dangerous game; *Jonah 4.5*—Jonah went out and sat *sulking*; *Matt. 26.66*—They shouted, Death! Death! Death! (They answering said, He is worthy of death); *1 John 1.4*—If you do as I say in this letter; *Romans 5.1*—We *can* have real peace (we *have* peace). There is no authority for “Sincerely, John” in *1 John 5.21*, or for the final “Good-bye” in *2 Peter 3.18*.

Anachronisms

The inspired writers wrote of things which they saw and heard in the days in which they lived, and a translator has no authority to bring the descriptive matter into line with present day manners and customs. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians—Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. He did not write—*Shake hands for me*—as in the Living Bible. In *Daniel 1.5* the Living Bible says that the King planned “to make them his counsellors *when they graduated*”, and in *1.19*—The superintendent brought the young men to the king *for oral exams*. Jonah—“*bought a ticket*” for Tarshish (*1.3*). *Habakkuk 2.2* reads—And the Lord said . . . write my answer on a *bill-board*. (“Hoarding” in

the British edition). In *Hosea 4.12* the translator and his “committee of specialists in the Hebrew and Greek languages” could find no equivalent for “Divining by the staff” as described in the Hebrew and rendered in the A.V.—“ask counsel at their stocks, and their staff declareth unto them”. The Living Bible renders this—Divine truth comes to them *through tea leaves*. *Exodus 16.32*—Take three litres of it to be kept as a *museum specimen* for ever. *Song of Solomon 1.3*—“How fragrant your *cologne!*” *Song of Solomon 3.3*—“The *police* stopped me”.

Weakened testimony to the Deity of Christ

In several passages which have an important bearing on the Deity of Christ the Living Bible presents a considerably weaker testimony than the manuscript evidence warrants. *Romans 9.5* reads—“Christ himself was one of you, a Jew so far as his human nature is concerned, he who now rules over all things. Praise God for ever”. This eliminates the testimony that “Christ is over all God blessed for ever”—that He is *God*. The clear declaration of 1 Timothy 3.16 that “God was manifest in the flesh” is reduced to—“But the answer lies in Christ, who came to earth as a man”. This no longer asserts that He is *God*. *John 6.69*—Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God—is changed to—The holy Son of God. *Ephesians 3.9*—Who created all things by Jesus Christ—becomes “He who made all things”, omitting “by Jesus Christ”. *Eph. 3.14,15* makes no mention of God as the “Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, but only as “the Father of all the great family of God”.

Malachi’s prophecy of “the Lord whom ye seek” is reduced to “The one you are looking for”, and “the Lord” is relegated to a footnote (*Mal. 3.1*). The prophecy of Christ as the “Desire of all nations” in *Haggai 2.7* is accompanied by a footnote, “*treasures of the nations*”, which weakens its messianic application. In *John 9.35* “The Son of God” is replaced by “*the Messiah*” in the text, and accompanied by a note—“Literally, the Son of Man”. *John 16.16* omits—“because I go unto the Father”.

Inconsistencies in vocabulary

Although the translation evidently aims at simplicity, there are many passages where the vocabulary is more difficult than that of the Authorised Version. In the Living Bible *Matt. 7.16-20* contains no less than fourteen latinized words, including—detect, identify, confuse, examining, variety, produces, delicious, inedible. In the same passage the Authorised Version has only two latinized words. “*Permeates*” in *Matt. 13.33*; “*nullify*” in *15.6*; “*demonstration*” in *16.1*; and *remonstrate*” in *16.22*, are all more difficult than the words which they replace. The same tendency can be seen in the Old Testament, for instance, in *Daniel 1.9*—“Now as it happened, God had given the superintendent a special appreciation for Daniel, and sympathy for his predicament”. In *Daniel 2.34* “By supernatural means” replaces “without hands”, and in *Daniel 11.29* we find “at the predestined

time". If the reader is expected to find no difficulty over "predestined" in Daniel, one might ask why the word "predestinate" was not allowed to stand in Romans and Ephesians.

The underlying text

To write a detailed appraisal of the underlying text would demand far more space than can be devoted to the subject here. Generally speaking, the Living Bible keeps fairly close to the Westcott-Hort-Nestle text, with occasional exceptions, and most of the significant omissions and variations which are affected by *textual* considerations can be traced to the uncritical adoption of an unreliable form of the text. More information on this subject will be found in other articles available from the Trinitarian Bible Society.

As in all modern versions, there are some passages in the Living Bible which are simply, accurately and appropriately rendered, but the exceptions are so numerous, and so serious, that the reader is given a very misleading impression of the character and content of the inspired Word. The present review provides more than enough detailed evidence to show that the Living Bible is far from reliable, and cannot be recommended either for public or for private use. Those who adopt it lose infinitely more than they gain.

The Trinitarian Bible Society exists to publish and distribute the Holy Scriptures throughout the world in many languages, in accurate and trustworthy translations. Further information literature is available on request.

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To publish and distribute the Holy Scriptures throughout the world in many languages.

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To uphold the doctrines of reformed Christianity, bearing witness to the equal and eternal deity of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, One God in three Persons.

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To uphold the Bible as the inspired, inerrant Word of God.

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