

A Problem with Bible Translations

1.5 Spacing

11 Pages

In a nutshell...

The practice of writing the Names of Christ as well as the pronouns referring to Him in upper case, caught on in full in Afrikaans during the past century. This is and remains an honourable practice which should be maintained.

What, then, is the problem? Since 2006, the translation of the New Afrikaans Bible which is due to be published in 2016 or later has progressed. This is called, *The Bible: a direct translation*.

The translators of the new Afrikaans Bible want to use lower case letters for the Names of Christ and the relevant pronouns in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. **This would entail that His Names, for example *God, Lord, Son (of God), King, Priest, Prophet and Messiah* would be written in lower case** – for example *son, king* and *prophet*. The reason for this is that the Bible translators acquired a wrong mental attitude.

To what extent do the Bible translators also remove the Holy Spirit from the Old Testament by writing His Name as *spirit (gees)*, with a small “s” (or “g”).

In this document it is affirmed that the way of reasoning that resulted in the use of lower case originates to a large extent from the Roman Catholic Church.

We should all strive to have the Names of Christ and the pronouns referring to Him written in upper case letters, from start to finish in the new Afrikaans Bible translation.

Currently, two editions of the new (2016) Afrikaans Bible are being planned, namely: one a lower case and the other one an upper case translation.

1. Some churches want the upper-case edition

Six Afrikaans churches already indicated that they would prefer using the upper-case edition of the new (2016) Bible. These are the Afrikaans Protestant Church, the Evangelical Reformed Church, the Afrikaans Baptist Church, the Apostolic Faith Mission, the Full Gospel Church, and the Pentecostal Protestant Church.

25 Afrikaans churches are collaborating in the new translation. It is our duty to pray for these and work towards convincing many of these, if not all, to use the upper-case edition.

The Bible Society requested that the churches preferring upper case form a joint commission. This commission has to compile a list of words and verses from the Old Testament where upper case is to be used for the upper case edition of the new (2016) Bible.

2. What is the origin of the problem?

The use of lower case was introduced in Bible translations mainly as a result of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church. Throughout centuries this church banned the translating of the Bible into vernaculars. They insisted Latin was the language to be used in the church. Even distribution of Bibles among the common people was either neglected or prohibited.

From 1961 to 1965, the well-known Vatican II (which was a large gathering, or concilium of leaders from the worldwide Catholic Church) took place. At this concilium it was decided to revoke the church ban on Bible translation and Bible distribution. This decision was eagerly welcomed by the United Bible Societies (the UBS).

Roman Catholics number more than double the number of Protestants worldwide (see: *Operation World*, 2010 edition, page 3). It is logical that henceforth they would have more influence on theological views and thus on translations of the Bible.

What is the problem? Through the ages Roman Catholic theology was greatly influenced by pagan concepts. The problem was intensified because the Bible was not available in vernaculars and the common people (the laity) were not able to read the Bible themselves and address the false teachings of the church. Even nowadays the pagan concepts are still rampant in that the Roman church to a large extent still teaches that the narratives of the Old Testament

(even about creation) are the product of myths (tales about gods), sagas (tales about hero's), legends and fables. They allege those were tales told by primitive people and afterwards put into writing. Thus, according to many Catholics the Old Testament is the product of old folk-tales.

How do we know that this reasoning has an influence on Afrikaans Bible translations in fact? Many theological faculties and Bible Knowledge departments in South Africa taught students during the past decades among others that the Bible is to a large extent the product of folk-tales, and thus myths, legends, fables and sagas. This influence results in the Names of Christ being written in lower case.

The truth is that many of the lecturers, who taught and are still teaching students these things, are now the Bible translators.

It may help readers to understand if I mention the following: Once I addressed a conference on this subject and afterwards a man came up to me and told me he had been a Roman Catholic for the first 20 years of his life. He completed the full catechisms process in that church. He confirmed that everything I said was true as the Roman church taught it to them exactly like that.

Note: This reasoning was to a large extent adopted by the translators of the 2016 Afrikaans Bible and is evident from the first trial edition of this translation, where in the Introduction to the Book of Genesis, the following is said:

The name Genesis means "origin" or "beginning". Therefore the book starts with a section (1-11) consisting of different stories trying to describe the origin of humanity from the viewpoint of the spiritual convictions of the people of biblical times.

Genesis was composed of stories that came from different times and environments.

3. What are the other arguments of the Roman Catholic theologians (and many of our own theologians)?

They say the people of the Old Testament did not know Christ yet. Therefore, Christ was also unknown to the authors of the Books of the Old Testament and consequently they were unable to talk or write about Him. For that reason, nothing in the Old Testament could have been written about Christ. The implication is that, according to the Old Testament, it could not

be a Divine Person (God Himself) who would die for our sins, as people from the time of the Old Testament were unaware of Him.

In November 2012, I met with the academic dean of St John Vianney Seminary, of the Roman Catholic Church, in Waterkloof, Pretoria.

He assured me he was firmly convinced of that which he learnt at a seminary in Rome regarding the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament. There they were taught that the context of the Old Testament people should be taken into account. Time and again the question has to be asked: “Who did the prophet in exile together with the nation of Judah/Israel have in mind when writing the four *Servant of the Lord* prophecies in Isaiah and which appear in deutero-Isaiah (chapters 40–66)?” Most likely he had the nation of Israel or a well-known king of Judah/Israel, or Moses, or Cyrus in mind. In terms of that the translation has to be done. The point of view is that the nation in exile as well as that prophet (and therefore the other prophets as well) had not known Christ at that stage and therefore could not have had Him in mind while writing the prophecies. Therefore (according to him) lower case in the Messianic prophecies in the Old Testament is approved for use.

(*My comment:* This indicates that the Scriptures are regarded as a product flowing from men, and not as a revelation from God. Furthermore, the functioning of Christ in the Old Testament, for example His numerous appearances in visions to people, is not taken into consideration.)

Unfortunately many of our Afrikaans theologians reason similarly and this is being taught to students in South Africa. This school of thought spilled over from Roman Catholicism into Protestant theology.

Keep in mind, in countries such as the United Kingdom, Switzerland and the Netherlands the number of Catholics exceed the number of Protestants (compare the book: *Operation World*). The Catholics cling to the Vulgate (the Latin Bible translation) and therefore, consciously or unconsciously kept conveying their opinion and comprehension of the Bible universally, which influenced the Protestant exegesis of Scripture and understanding of the Bible, for example comprehension of the Names of Christ in the Old Testament. This influence spilled over to South Africa.

4. What does the Bible teach?

The Roman Catholic view is refuted by the following facts:

We may react by saying that the authors of the Books of the Old Testament did know Christ very well indeed! This we know as He, being the Angel of God or Messenger/Word of God (Exodus 14:19, 24; compare John 1:1-3) was present in the column of cloud and fire, with the Israelites for 40 years during their wilderness wandering and guided them. He also appeared to individuals. Thus the Israelites were very much acquainted with Christ! Also, being the Spokesperson of God, He appeared in a vision to each of the prophets on every occasion He gave him a prophecy (Numbers 12:6-8). He gave the prophecies with immense power, the same power He exerted when He spoke the creation into existence. He even roared like a lion when speaking to the prophets (Amos 3:8). *The Spirit of Christ* was in the prophets (1 Peter 1:11).

The prophet Isaiah, for example prophesied over a period of 40 years (740-701 BC). How often the experience overwhelmed him when Christ, who has always been God's Spokesperson, appeared to him! He knew Christ very well indeed. Isaiah was able to write about Christ because he knew Him personally! From this the historical context of the lives of Old Testament people is apparent.

Furthermore this historical context constitutes that Old Testament people were all sinners who could only be saved by faith in the Messiah (Christ, the Anointed One). Therefore they had to believe in the Names of the Messiah and His function as Saviour in order to be saved. For that reason it was important that people in Old Testament times had to know the Names of the Messiah.

The historical context of the Old Testament people becomes clear as we realise that Christ had created the creation (John 1:3) and that He maintained and cared for it even in Old Testament times, even as He does today (Heb 1:3). Every day the Old Testament people practically lived in the reality of His care for them and the entire creation.

Note: People advocating lower case often argue that: "Nowhere in the Hebrew text upper case is used."

We respond to this: The Hebrew text never uses lower case either! The reason for this is that the Hebrew script differs totally as there is no upper or lower case in that script.

5. Examples from the Vulgate

The Vulgate is the Latin translation of the Bible, and at the Council of Trent in 1546 accepted by the Roman Catholic Church as their official translation.

In the Vulgate references to Christ are mainly written in lower case.

Compare the following table:

Text	NKJV	Vulgate
Gen 22:11; Ex 3:2	Angel of the LORD	angelus Domini
Gen 32:24	Man	vir
Dan 7:13	Son of Man	filius hominis
Amos 9:12	My name	nomen meum
Micah 5:2	Ruler	dominator
Zech 9:9	King	rex
Mal 3:1	Messenger of the covenant	angelus testamenti

Note: Please consult the Names and pronouns analysed in the document, entitled: *English and Latin Bibles analysed – ANNEXURE*, also available on this website.

6. Syncretism

It is widely known that syncretism occurs in many places in the Roman Catholic world and elsewhere. The word *syncretism* means the intermingling of the Christian faith with pagan religions. This results in not acknowledging Christ as the only Saviour.

7. Examples showing the influence of Roman Catholic theology

We can assume that the Roman church had some influence on Bible translations during the past 1600 years. However, since 1965 this influence has increased dramatically.

Consider how some of the Messianic prophecies were translated in the following Bible translations (the first three in the list appear in *The Layman's Parallel Bible*, 1973 edition by Zondervan Bible Publishers):

	Psalm 2:2	Psalm 110:1	Isaiah 53:11	Daniel 7:13
KJV	anointed	my Lord	my righteous servant	one like the Son of man
Living Bible	Messiah, Christ the King	my Lord the Messiah	my righteous Servant	a Man
RSV	anointed	my lord	the righteous one, my servant	one like a son of man
NIV	Anointed One	my Lord	my righteous servant	one like a son of man
NKJV	Anointed	my Lord	My righteous Servant	One like the Son of Man

This table reveals the following:

Regarding the Name *Messiah* in Psalm 2:2: The KJV and RSV do not follow the interpretation and teaching of the New Testament (Acts 4:25, 26). These two Bible translations deny the truth of Christ to be the Messiah, according to Psalm 2:2.

Regarding the Name *Lord* in Psalm 110:1: The RSV does not follow the interpretation of Christ and the New Testament (Luke 20:41-44; Acts 2:34, 35; Hebrews 8:1). According to this Bible translation, it was not a Divine Person (being God Himself) who was seated at the right hand of God the Father even in Old Testament times.

Regarding the Name *My righteous Servant* in Isaiah 53:11: The KJV, RSV and NIV do not follow the interpretation of the New Testament. In many Bible translations in other languages, both the words *Righteous* and *Servant* are written in upper case. (For the Name *Righteous One* read: Acts 3:14; 7:52; 22:14; 1 Peter 3:18; 1 John 2:1.) Using lower case for at least the word *Servant* means that, according to such Bible translations, it was not a Divine Person (thus one of the Persons in the Trinity) who would die for our sins. This Divine Person, who is Himself God and who is Christ the Messiah, would die even for the sins of the Old Testament people. (Note that the word our appears ten times in Isaiah 53:4-6.)

Notes: The fact that this Servant is God is shown by the fact that He *had no sins* (Isaiah 53:9), that He *was perfectly righteous* (Isaiah 53:11) and that He *was able to justify others*, thus to save them from hell and give them heaven (Isaiah 53:11).

In Isaiah 53:11, the word *Servant* refers to Christ (compare Isaiah 42:1 with Matthew 12:18).

Regarding the Name *Son of Man* in Daniel 7:13, the RSV and NIV do not follow the interpretation of the New Testament (Luke 21:27; John 5:25-27) which means that according to these two translations it is not a Divine Person that will come in the clouds of heaven on Judgement Day to execute the final judgement.

Note: In the documents, titled: *English and Latin Bibles analysed*, and its ANNEXURE, 38 English Bible translations were analysed. These documents appear on the website www.2016vertaling.co.za.

8. How does this influence the new Afrikaans Bible translation, due to be published in 2016 or later?

The 1983 Afrikaans Bible translation has lower case in all the verses which appear in the above table (in point 7). The 2016 translation tends to go even further, because from the first edition of its trial translation (published in 2008) even the Holy Spirit is translated out. There Genesis 1:2 reads as follows (in translation): *And the spirit of God was hovering over the water.* Note that the word *spirit* (*gees*) is written with a lower case “s” (or “g”).

It is evident that Christ is translated out of both the 1983 and 2016 Afrikaans Bible translations. This means that Roman Catholic theology unfortunately caused the Names of Christ to be written in lower case in the Messianic prophecies of the Old Testament. (This applies for example to His Names: *God, Lord, Son of God, King, Priest, Prophet* and *Messiah*.) A further illustration of this fact is that in Isaiah 53 (the well-known chapter dealing with the prophecy about Christ’s death) lower case is used. In this way Christ is translated out of the Old Testament.

Summary: Even in our time the use of lower case is evident in many English Bible translations. This shows the enormous influence that through the ages has been emerging from the Roman Catholic Church with its Latin Bible translations, and which is still rampant.

9. What our standpoint should be

9.1 In contrast to the Bible translations mentioned above, the following ones prove to be more trustworthy: New American Standard Bible (NASB), Amplified Bible (Amp), New King James Version (NKJV), Green’s Literal Translation (GLT), New Life Version (NLV), 21st Century KJV (21KJV), Holman Christian Standard Bible (CSB), and The Scriptures

(a Bible translation of the Messianic Jews, ISBN 0-620-22490-8). These translations sometimes have more upper case letters than even the 1953 Afrikaans Bible translation.

By using more upper case letters, the way is shown that each new Bible translation ought to follow.

9.2 Regarding the evangelisation of people who adhere to other religions, it is important that Christ's Names should always be written in upper case. How can one preach the Gospel to them if one's own message is empty because Christ was removed from it?

9.3 Nowadays, Christianity is spreading rapidly in some countries. But: What quality of Christianity is being promoted by Bible translations that use lower case letters for the Names of Christ? Let us do what we can to stop the misleading.

9.4 The use of lower case letters points to imitation of the New Age movement which pursues the equating of all religions. According to this reasoning, anyone can be the saviour from sins.

9.5 The practice of writing the Names of Christ in lower case might point to a situation where the Bible translators are shedding the reverence and fear of God.

9.6 By returning to pure Biblical values, we may set an example for many other Bible translating projects to do the same.

9.7 To reject Christ is the core of sin (John 16:7). In the light of the foregoing we know it to be a frightful sin to use lower case in for example Isaiah 53. A dreadful judgement is envisaged for the perspective of translating Christ out of the Bible.

9.8 *Our task and purpose should be:* To give the honour and glory to Christ in both the Old and New Testaments. This has to be done by writing all references to Him in upper case.

9.9 Regarding the Introduction which is to appear before each Book of the Bible it is important not to produce false doctrine therein. Rather mention in the Introduction to Genesis for example that the whole Bible was inspired by the Spirit of God and that God therefore also revealed Genesis 1 to 11.

The following truth applies at all times, thus also to the time of the Old Testament:

Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either (1 John 2:23).

This means that even the people from Old Testament times could be saved only by faith in Christ. Thus, they had to know Him in order to be able to believe in Him. They came to know Him from His appearances in Old Testament times, and also from the Old Testament itself.

10. Publications

10.1 The book, titled: *Do we want an Old Testament without Christ?* (compiled by prof PW Hoek and myself) is a submission to the Bible Society of South Africa and the Bible translators, in 2008. This book offers a more comprehensive overview of this subject. This submission appears in both English and Afrikaans on the website www.2016vertaling.co.za

10.2 To acquire a positive overview of how Christ functions in each Book of the Old Testament, you may read the book, titled: *The Wonder of Jesus in the Old Testament* (250 pages) on the website www.thetruerevelation.co.za (don't Google). It is also available in book format and can be ordered from Danie Haasbroek (contact details appears below). Price: R80.00 per copy, plus postage.

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✧ To find a bibliography for this document, you may consult the bibliography that appears at the end of the book, titled: *Do we want an Old Testament without Christ?* (See website above.)

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✘ **This document, titled: *A Problem with Bible Translations*, is available in both English and Afrikaans on the website www.2016vertaling.co.za .**

✘ **My books appear on the website www.thetruevelation.co.za (don't Google).**

All the documents that appear on this website were submitted in advance to the Bible Society, the leaders of the Afrikaans Bible Translation Project, and the editorial staff of *Kerkbode*.