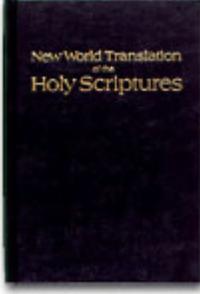
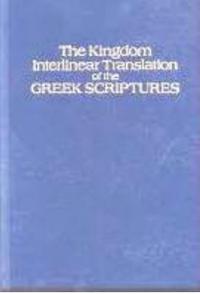


# Bible Translation and Study

## The Purpose of this Book

	<p>Since the <i>New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures</i> was published between 1950 and 1961 by Jehovah's Witnesses, it has been the object of much unwarranted criticism. The aim of this site is to discuss some of the criticisms of the <i>New World Translation</i> and to offer a defense.</p>	
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I compiled some of these articles as replies to letters from an online correspondent, who, unfortunately, refused to read them. Since then, I have researched a number of other articles in answer to common questions about the *New World Translation*.

Two articles on this site are not about the *New World Translation*. One of them discusses whether Jehovah's Witnesses are guilty of false prophecy, as many opposers allege. Another defends Jehovah's Witnesses belief that the Archangel Michael is Jesus Christ. The main focus of this site, however, is the translation of the Bible.

Also, there are some other excellent websites by Jehovah's Witnesses defending the *New World Translation*. See the '[Links](#)' page for details.

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#### FEATURED ARTICLES

October 11th, 2005: [Does the \*New World Translation\* Add Words to Colossians 1:17, 18?](#)

I have also made some alterations to a few of the articles, particularly those concerning [Franz & Hebrew](#) and [Hommel & the NWT](#).

July 11th, 2005: ["Fullness of the Divine Quality" at Colossians 2:9](#).

June 10th, 2005: The [Kingdom Interlinear Translation and the Deception of MacGregor Ministries](#). It is amazing the lies that some people will tell to support their beliefs. You can read a refutation of some of them in this essay.

## Frederick W. Franz and Biblical Hebrew

A number of critical websites make assertions to the effect that Frederick W. Franz, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses until his death in 1992, was unable to translate a simple verse from Hebrew into English, when asked to do so during a court case in Scotland in 1954.



When one man wrote to me about the above assertion, I challenged him to prove it. He replied by sending me a copy of Robert Hommel's article on the subject. Hommel, however, concedes that Franz was not asked to translate from Hebrew into English, but from *English into Hebrew*. A number of other sources, however, continue to misrepresent the facts.<sup>[1]</sup>

Now, as the court record shows, Franz refused to translate a

“ Franz was not asked to translate from Hebrew into English, but from English into Hebrew - a different matter altogether. ”

Bible verse from English into Hebrew. First of all, we must agree with Stafford<sup>[2]</sup> that the fact that Franz refused to do so, saying "No, I *won't* attempt to do that," doesn't mean that he couldn't do it. After all, his knowledge of Hebrew or Greek was not in the slightest relevant to the subject of the court case at hand, which was whether Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to ordain ministers of religion . A court is not a circus and Franz certainly wasn't obliged to go along with some lawyer's dubious tactics. Franz stood up for himself and refused to play along.

At this point it is worth asking what the attorney's point was. It should go without saying that if you have a sentence in language A and you translate it into language B and then someone else translates it back into language A again, you won't necessarily end up with the sentence you started with. Hence, asking someone to translate a text from language B back into language A and then compare the result with the original text really proves nothing. If that was the lawyer's intention, he was either extremely naive regarding how language and translation work, or he was being disingenuous. And yet, someone ignorant of how translation works could easily be fooled into thinking that the rendering was defective, simply because it was not identical with the original text. (Presumably this is what Millard means by his observation, 'but, of course, we have the Hebrew text of Genesis'.<sup>[3]</sup>) So the lawyer's question either revealed a lamentable lack of understanding of translation principles on his part - or else it was a trap. Under those circumstances, Franz had nothing to gain by attempting to translate.

Note, also, how Hommel tries to put words into Millard's mouth. All Millard said was that he 'saw no great problem' in rendering the verse into Hebrew, but according to Hommel, Millard confirms that "there is no good reason for Franz to have refused to perform an English-to-Hebrew translation". This is not what

Millard said and, as we have seen, leaves out other likely reasons for Franz' refusal.

But even supposing for the sake of argument (not conceding) that Franz *was* unable to translate Genesis 2:4 from English into Hebrew, would that affect this qualifications as a Bible translator? Is translating from English into Hebrew the same as translating from Hebrew into English? An important principle in translation work is this: you work *from* the foreign language *into* your mother tongue. Contradicting Hommel's view that this is a "detail", something "of little significance in determining Franz's skill in Biblical Hebrew", *The Translator's Handbook* by Morry Sofer points out:

"A distinction must be made between the languages one translates from and into. Generally speaking, one translates from another language into one's own native language. This is because one is usually intimately familiar with one's own language, while even years of study and experience do not necessarily enable one to be completely at home with an acquired language. The exceptions to this rule are usually those people who have lived in more than one culture, and have spoken more than one language on a regular basis. Those may be able to translate in both directions. There are also rare gifted individuals who have mastered another language to such a degree that they can go both ways. They are indeed extremely rare. Given all of this, one should allow for the fact that while the ability of the accomplished translator to write and speak in the target language (i.e., one's native tongue) may be flawless, that person may not necessarily be able to write excellent prose or give great speeches in the source language (i.e., the language from which one translates). Then again, it is not necessary to be able to write and speak well in the language one translates from, while it is to be expected that a good translator is also a good writer and speaker in his or her native language."<sup>[4]</sup>

What the *Translator's Handbook* says here is self-evident to most people working in translation.<sup>[5]</sup> Many people work as competent translators without being able *speaking* or *writing* the source language well. That is not to say that they can't speak it at all, but they can't speak it flawlessly. Translating, on the other hand, which implies understanding the text in the source language and rendering it into the target language, is a different matter altogether. F. W. Franz certainly knew the difference. He had just told the court: "I do not *speaking* Hebrew." So, obviously, the fact that Franz decided not to translate the verse certainly does not prove that he was incompetent to translate Hebrew into English and is even less relevant to the question of whether he could translate Greek into English.

In any case, as Stafford - who does know Hebrew - points out in his book, the verse in question (Genesis 2:4) isn't all that easy to translate. He says: "It should not be overlooked that this verse is actually somewhat complicated. It has no finite verb but one Niphal infinitive construct, with suffix, and one Qal infinitive construct"<sup>[6]</sup> Even Hommel's own star witness, Millard, recognises that there is "uncertainty over the passage."<sup>!</sup>

“It is not necessary to be able to write and speak well in the language that one translates from”

*The Translator's Handbook*

Indeed, Rolf Furuli relates his own experiment with two professors of Hebrew:

"I asked two of my colleagues who teach Hebrew at the University of Oslo, to translate the passage. Both had problems with the translation from English to Hebrew, even though they both are experienced teachers, and their results were very different."<sup>[7]</sup>

In fact, *all* Bible translators, not just the NWT translators, make generous use of lexicons, grammars, commentaries and other translation aids. Few, if any, of them approach their work so casually as to attempt to translate without recourse to all the printed scholarship that is available. It is simply not expected of a translator that he or she should be able to work without all these aids. As *The Translator's Handbook* puts it:

No translator, no matter how accomplished or well versed in both the source and target languages, can do without dictionaries and reference literature.<sup>[8]</sup>

So, translation involves careful study of a wide variety of resources. Furthermore, translation is a synergistic group effort, in which a number of different translators contribute their expertise and talents. Additionally, there is no reason why the *New World Translation Committee* could not have sought the input and comments of a number of authorities on Bible languages, both inside and outside the Jehovah's Witnesses organization.

“Two of my colleagues who teach Hebrew at the University of Oslo ... had problems with the translation [of Genesis 2:4] from English to Hebrew.”

Rolf Furuli

Finally, Millard observes that 'there is a difference between translating into a language and freely composing in it'. He doesn't state what the difference is, but we would submit that translating into a language is actually more difficult. When expressing your own thoughts in a foreign language, if you have difficulty with a certain sentence construction, grammatical detail or vocabulary item, you have the option of stating matters differently. You have the right to express your thoughts in your own words. But when you're translating, the thoughts aren't yours. You have the additional

responsibility to faithfully represent the original. So you are working under tighter constraints. Translation is therefore more difficult than freely composing in a language. And, of course, translating verbally before an audience, without preparation and under psychological pressure, is more difficult still.

So, leaving aside for a moment the unresolved question of whether Franz was even on the NWT translation committee, my correspondent's original assertion, namely that Franz was unable to translate a simple verse from Hebrew into English has been demonstrated to be incorrect in all its details.

(1) Franz was asked to translate *into* Hebrew not *from* Hebrew into English.

(2) It can't be proved that Franz couldn't translate the verse, only that he didn't want to, and there are perfectly reasonable alternative explanations for that.

(3) It is not a simple verse, as two teachers of Hebrew at University level had difficulty in translating it and even Hommel's own source says that there is 'uncertainty over the passage'.

A quick Google search shows that there are quite a few sites still perpetuating this calumny. That should raise a red flag for cautious readers, some of whom might like to try an experiment: write to one or two of them and suggesting that they correct the error? There is more than enough evidence for them to do so. If it is just an oversight rather than a deliberate attempt to smear Franz, then surely they'll be happy to make a correction and issue an apology. If, on the other hand, what they're really up to is character assassination, then the best you can hope for is that they'll ignore you.

The real truth is this: Witness critics don't like Franz because he was a Jehovah's Witness. They have deliberately misrepresented the facts about this whole matter, slinging as much dirt as they can in Franz' direction, hoping that some of it will stick. These are the worst kind of gutter tactics and pretty much what we have come to expect from many critics of the Watch Tower. Even if we do not agree with every rendering in the *New World Translation*, it is time for critics to admit that it is not some sort of evil propaganda but rather it's what James Parkinson calls it: "A relatively accurate translation from another theological perspective." So how about it? If Benjamin Kedar - quoted in the article *Hommel and the New World Translation* - can admit the accuracy of the *New World Translation* without becoming a Jehovah's Witness, so can they!

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<sup>[1]</sup> For instance, Walter Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults* (1997) page 124 asserts that F. W. Franz "admitted under oath that he could not translate Genesis 2:4 from the Hebrew". At the time of writing, the exact same - entirely false - accusation was repeated on at least 29 websites. It seems that few people bothered to check the facts cited by Walter Martin, until Greg Stafford published *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, which exposed this distortion of the truth.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, pp. 561-4.

<sup>[3]</sup> Millard's full reply, as quoted by Hommel, is: "I see no great problem in rendering Genesis 2:4 from English into Hebrew, but, of course, we have the Hebrew text of Genesis. There is a difference between translating into a language and freely composing in it, which, I assume, is what LaSor meant . . . . I suspect that the uncertainty over this passage arises from the common modern view that there is a break between the first part of the verse and the second, a break that is made in many modern translations. Some, on the other hand, do not see the necessity for supposing such a break exists and the first part of the verse introduces the rest of the chapter. The translation back into Hebrew would depend to some extent on the English version being used." Hommel uses ellipses, showing that he has omitted something from Millard's reply. Regrettably, we do not know why the material was omitted. It is to be hoped that Hommel has not succumbed to the temptation to quote Millard selectively.

<sup>[4]</sup> *The Translator's Handbook*, Morry Sofer, page 34.

<sup>[5]</sup> The present author worked as a translator and interpreter for a period of about five years.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, pp. 561-4

<sup>[7]</sup> B-Hebrew discussion list, 15/6/01

<sup>[8]</sup> *The Translator's Handbook*, p. 99.

## Robert Hommel's Comments on the *New World Translation*

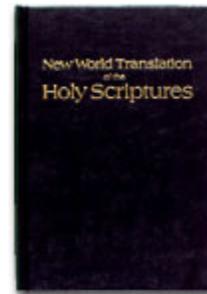
It seems that attacks on the NWT fall into two main categories, (a) that the NWT is biased in that it has been specially produced to support the beliefs of Jehovah's Witnesses and (b) that the NWT translators were incapable of producing an accurate Bible translation. Leaving aside the first charge, which can only really be answered on a case-by-case basis, it is interesting to consider the second accusation.

If it were really true that the New World Translation committee was not made up of competent Greek and Hebrew scholars, then it should be relatively easy for opposers to point to hundreds of infelicitous and incorrect renderings *in areas that were not doctrinally contentious*. In practice, however, such criticisms are few and far between. Most attacks on the NWT focus on certain controversial verses, considered important because of relevance to Christian doctrine. This in itself is a strong argument against the assertion that the translators did not really know Hebrew and Greek.

Opposers of Jehovah's Witnesses frequently criticize the *New World Translation* on the basis of the credentials of the translators. Of course, the translators were anonymous, so it is not known what, if any, paper qualifications they had. In any case, the lack of formal qualifications would not necessarily disqualify a person from being a talented and capable translator. There are more ways to learn Biblical languages and translation skills than through traditional university studies.

In this article, we shall discuss claims made by Robert Hommel, who has written an article on the subject. Hommel believes that Greg Stafford's defense of Fred Franz is "superficial, inaccurate and misleading". <sup>[1]</sup>.

The first thing we have to acknowledge is that we don't really know for certain who produced the *New World Translation*. Of course, various writers have made assertions on the matter, but, until proof is forthcoming, that is all they are - assertions. To say that Franz or anyone else was on the *New World Bible Translation Committee* is pure speculation. It may be true and it may be false. It would not be at all surprising if F. W. Franz *were* one of the translators, possibly even the main translator. But the fact remains that we don't know for sure. How can critics insist so vehemently on the truth of something for which they have so little proof?



What is surely beyond dispute is that someone translated the *New World Translation*. After all, translations don't make themselves. And to be able to translate the Hebrew Scriptures, someone had to know Hebrew. The idea that a person or group of persons with little or no knowledge of Hebrew could translate the whole of the Old Testament - as Hommel apparently believes - stretches credibility to its very limits.

That is even more obvious if you consider the comments of a man like Benjamin Kedar, who is an a professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem:

“I have never discovered in the 'New World Translation' [of the Hebrew Scriptures] any biased intent to read something into the text that it does not contain”

Professor Benjamin Kedar, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

"In my linguistic research in connection with the Hebrew Bible and translations, I often refer to the English edition of what is known as the 'New World Translation.' In so doing, I find my feeling repeatedly confirmed that this work reflects an honest endeavor to achieve an understanding of the text that is as accurate as possible. Giving evidence of a broad command of the original language, it renders the original words into a second language understandably without deviating unnecessarily from the specific structure of the Hebrew ... Every statement of language allows for a certain latitude in interpreting or translating. So the linguistic solution in any given case may be open to debate. But I have never discovered in the 'New World Translation' any biased intent to read something into the text that it does not contain."

Let's analyse what Professor Kedar is able to tell us. First of all, is he qualified to express an opinion? Some critics think not. True, he is apparently not a *teacher* of Biblical Hebrew, or a *translator*. But, to engage in 'linguistic research in connection

with the Hebrew Bible', Professor Kedar of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem must surely be a competent scholar of Hebrew.

Kedar is no friend of the Watch Tower Society. In a subsequent communication he is quite critical of the Jehovah's Witnesses' organization, and even remarks: "I do not feel any sympathy for any sect and this includes Jehovah's Witnesses." But Kedar apparently has the integrity to admit that even people he doesn't like can achieve worthy objectives that should be recognised. Perhaps Kedar doesn't feel pressured to defend a particular doctrinal position. When challenged about his statement <sup>[2]</sup>, he stood by his original comments about the New World Translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, stating:

"Several years ago I quoted the so-called New World Translation among several Bible versions in articles that deal with purely philological questions (such as the rendition of the causitive hiphil, of the participle qotel). In the course of my comparative studies I found the NWT rather illuminating: it gives evidence of an acute awareness of the structural characteristics of Hebrew as well as of an honest effort to faithfully render these in the target language. A translation is bound to be a compromise, and as such its details are open to criticism; this applies to the NWT too. In the portion corresponding to the Hebrew Bible, however, I have never come upon an obviously erroneous rendition which would find its explanation in a dogmatic bias. Repeatedly I have asked the antagonists of the Watchtower-Bible who turned to me for a clarification of my views, to name specific verses for a renewed scrutiny. This either was not done or else the verses submitted (e.g. Genesis 4:13; 6:3; 10:9; 15:5; 18:20; etc.) did not prove the point, namely, a tendentious translation."<sup>[3]</sup>

Kedar obviously has a lot to teach many of the Watch Tower Society's detractors about impartiality, bracketing and scholarly debate. To put it simply: just because you don't like Jehovah's Witnesses or disagree with them doctrinally, that does not give you the right to make unsubstantiated accusations against them.

Robert Hommel has made an astonishing conjecture, which he rather arrogantly calls a 'fact', that "anyone with an adequate library of English Bibles, Lexicons, and Bible Dictionaries could produce a translation similar to the NWT, with only a limited knowledge of the original languages." Hommel does not say whether he or anyone he knows has actually tried such an experiment. Of course, all translators have recourse to lexicons, concordances, dictionaries and other reference material. Indeed, it would be foolish for anyone to attempt to make a Bible translation without drawing on the centuries of scholarship that had preceded them. That applies to the translators of the NWT just as much as to all other Bible translators. However, Kedar's words speak for themselves. You don't get a "broad command of the original language" or an "acute awareness of the structural characteristics of Hebrew" by playing around with dictionaries and copying out of other Bible translations!<sup>[4]</sup>

**“It is not necessary to know the translators' academic qualifications in order to assess the quality of the translation”**

Rolf Furuli, who is a Lecturer in Semitic Languages at Oslo University, says with regard to the Hebrew portion of the NWT:

"In connection with writing my book I read the English text of the NWT against the Hebrew text, word for word. After first reading the Hebrew and then the English text, I sometimes said to myself: "Was this nuance really in the Hebrew text?" And certainly it was! The translators of the NWT have been extremely faithful both to their own translation principles and to the Hebrew text."<sup>[5]</sup>

Now, I think it's obvious that neither Kedar nor Furuli would be able to make the comments they did if the NWT translators had minimal or no knowledge of Hebrew. Hence, to say that the translators had no scholarship is patently untrue.

Hommel rejects the view that "the NWT itself is testimony that the Committee was skilled in the original languages", believing that such an approach 'begs the question', and asserts: "To demonstrate that the NWT is, indeed, a scholarly translation, one must produce positive evidence that the Translators possessed the skills necessary to render the Bible from the original languages into English." Of course, Hommel is right when he implies that it is not the instances where the NWT renderings coincide with other translations that show the quality of the translation, but rather the instances where they differ. And a different rendering could conceivably be the result of either superior scholarship or of ignorance. But to determine which of the two it was does not require that we know the qualifications (on paper or otherwise) of the translators. What it *does* require is that we examine the actual evidence for and against each of the renderings and make our own judgment. So if Hommel means that an examination of the translation itself by competent Hebrew scholars is insufficient 'positive evidence' of the translators' skills, then his assertion is palpably untrue. If Hommel's view were correct, it would be impossible to determine the accuracy of any number of translations, such as the Greek Septuagint, whose translators remain anonymous to this day. As it is, anyone with a knowledge of the original and target languages can compare the two and make a judgment about whether the translation is accurate or not (which is precisely what people like Kedar and Furuli have done) and, on that basis, draw inferences about the skills of the translators.<sup>[6]</sup>

Hommel's argument can also be refuted another way: if assessing the quality of various renderings is not a legitimate way of proving the scholarly credentials of the anonymous translators, then neither is it a way of disproving them! If you can't use good renderings to infer that the translators were competent, then neither can you use poor renderings to infer the opposite.<sup>[7]</sup>

Interestingly, although Hommel maintains that "there is no evidence that the NWT Translation Committee possessed the training or skills necessary to produce an English Bible from the original languages", his article fails to mention a single rendering that he views as evidence of lack of competence. The maxim 'publish or perish' would seem to apply here.

Scholar Frederick Fyvie Bruce provides food for thought in his book "A History of the English Bible" when he speaks of Thomas More's reaction to the Tyndale translation:

"It affords no pleasure to us to-day to contemplate two great Englishmen, men of principle who were both to suffer death for conscience sake, engaging in bitter controversy of this kind. But the issue was one in which the lives of men - and, as both Tyndale and More believed, the souls of men - were at stake;

and both men would probably have thought that the urbanities of modern theological debate betokened a failure to appreciate the seriousness of the issue. Yet More was no bigoted obscurantist; he was a leading humanist and patron of the new learning, and a warm friend of Erasmus, whose Greek New Testament Tyndale had now turned into English. One might have thought that he would at least have appreciated the cultural value of Tyndale's work, however much he deplored Tyndale's theological position.

"But no: Tyndale's New Testament, said More, was not the New Testament at all; it was a cunning counterfeit, so perverted in the interests of heresy "that it was not worthy to be called Christ's testament, but either Tyndale's own testament or the testament of his master Antichrist." To search for errors in it was like searching for water in the sea; it was so bad that it could not be mended, "for it is easier to make a web of new cloth than it is to sew up every hole in a net.

"We may well rub our eyes at these charges. Tyndale's New Testament lies before us, and Erasmus's Greek Testament of which it is a translation, and we can only be surprised that a scholar like More should go to such lengths in denouncing so good an achievement. True, there were things in it which were capable of improvement, as Tyndale himself acknowledged, but it was a pioneer work; the New Testament had never been turned from Greek directly into English before. Tyndale complained that if his printer so much as failed to dot an i, it was solemnly noted down and reckoned as a heresy."<sup>[8]</sup>

This passage contains some very sobering thoughts. It is easy to criticise what we do not agree with. But it is quite another thing to defend our criticisms.

By the way, have you ever seen 'The Watchtower' launch vitriolic attacks on other translations the way many of its critics do? Of course, reasoned critiques of the rendering of certain verses are published, but there is nothing approaching the venom that comes across in many web pages that criticise the *New World Translation*. In fact, Watch Tower publications have quoted literally dozens of Bible translations. In just one year (2003), 'The Watchtower' quoted from the Contemporary English Version, An American Translation, Charles B. Williams, the Greek Septuagint, J. B. Phillips, Today's English Version, the New International Version, the Jerusalem Bible, King James Version, Revised Standard Version and the New Jerusalem Bible. We have to wonder: Who is being reasonable and who is fanatical?

## Footnotes and References

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<sup>[1]</sup> Hommel's article can be found at [http://www.forananswer.org/Top\\_JW/FranzNWT.htm](http://www.forananswer.org/Top_JW/FranzNWT.htm)

<sup>[2]</sup> Perhaps Kedar was unaware at the time of his original statement of the reaction that his opinions would provoke. Anyone who comes out publicly as agreeing with anything Jehovah's Witnesses do or teach is likely to receive an avalanche of mail and email from religious opponents trying to induce them to change their minds. In *Truth in Translation*, Jason Beduhn describes his fellow scholars as "engaged in their own very specialized and arcane researches, and perhaps unaware (as I was until rudely shaken out of my ignorance) of the debate raging around us." (p. ix-x) In any case, the volume of queries received by Kedar after his comments apparently obliged him to issue a circular letter to be sent to all enquirers. This testifies to the intensity of the hatred for the *New World Translation* felt by many opposers.

<sup>[3]</sup> Kedar's full statement can be found on many internet sites.

<sup>[4]</sup> Unless, of course, you are getting help from above! But Watchtower has made no such claim and we may reasonably suppose that Hommel would like that explanation even less.

<sup>[5]</sup> B-Hebrew discussion list, 15/6/01. While it is true that Furuli is one of Jehovah's Witnesses, it would not be fair to say that this disqualifies him from expressing an opinion. Are critics who refuse to accept Furuli's testimony merely because he is a Jehovah's Witness willing to apply the same standard to the scholars *they* cite? That would mean that no scholar could be trusted to critique a translation that came from his own theological background. To apply that rule only to Furuli but not to evangelical scholars is special pleading.

<sup>[6]</sup> It is interesting that well over 90% of criticisms of the *New World Translation* concern the 'New Testament' portion that was written in Greek. Published criticisms of the NWT's Hebrew renderings are conspicuous by their almost complete absence, despite the obvious fact that the Hebrew scriptures are three to four times longer than the Greek. This may, of course, be due in part to the fact that many more evangelical scholars have studied Greek than have Hebrew, as well as that the New Testament is generally agreed to be much more significant theologically. However, the lack of published data on the matter, particularly viewed in the light of the extremely critical attitude of Witness detractors, certainly militates against the idea that the NWT translators were incompetent in Hebrew.

<sup>[7]</sup> Hommel also states: "To date, no such evidence has been provided by the Watchtower or its apologists." However, since he artificially limits the 'evidence' he is willing to consider to information about the translators' educational background, he omits from consideration information such as Rolf Furuli's detailed study entitled *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation: With a special look at the New World Translation of Jehovah's Witnesses*, published in 1999 (at least five years before his essay was written). It is difficult to see how a sound conclusion can be reached if all the relevant information has not been taken into account.

<sup>[8]</sup> 1979, 3rd edition, Lutterworth Press, London - pp. 39-41. We are indebted to the *Defense of the New World Translation* website for bringing our attention to this illuminating piece of history.

## Julius Mantey and the *New World Translation*

The purpose of this chapter is to comment on an article written by the late Dr Julius Mantey, in which he gives his opinion of the *New World Translation*. Dr Mantey's article is in black, and our comments are indented in blue.

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John 1:1, which reads "In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God," is shockingly mistranslated, "Originally the Word was, and the Word was with God, and the Word was a god," in a *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*, published under the auspices of Jehovah's Witnesses.

If a person very deeply and sincerely believes that Jesus is God, then it is easy to see why he would find the *New World Translation* rendering of John 1:1 'shocking'. Of course, a lot of things Jesus taught were also considered shocking by the people who heard him. So, too, the *New World Translation* may at times be shocking to traditionalists. The role of a Bible translation is not to avoid controversy, but to be accurate. But is John 1:1 mistranslated in the *New World Translation*? Let us see.

Since my name is used and our *Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* is quoted on page 744 to seek to justify their translation I am making this statement.

The translation suggested in our Grammar for the disputed passage is, "the Word was deity." Moffatt's rendering is "the Word was divine." William's translation is, "the Word was God Himself." Each translation reflects the dominant idea in the Greek. For, whenever an article does not precede a noun in Greek, that noun can either be considered as emphasizing the character, nature, essence or quality of a person or thing, as *theos* (God) does in John 1:1, or it can be translated in certain contexts as indefinite, as they have done. But of all the scholars in the world, as far as we know, none have translated this verse as Jehovah's Witnesses have.

This is an important admission on Mantey's part. Either the anarthrous (i.e. without the article) noun emphasizes the 'character, nature, essence, or quality' of a person, *or* it can be translated in certain contexts as indefinite. *Either* qualitative *or* indefinite. But the rendering 'The Word was God' is *neither* qualitative *nor* indefinite. It is definite and shows identity. C. B. Williams' translation - "the Word was God Himself" - is even more clearly making a statement of definite identification; it is certainly *not* qualitative. So the statement that 'each translation reflects the dominant idea in the Greek' is odd to say the least, when the various renderings cited actually contradict each other. 'The Word was divine' is quite a different proposition to 'the Word was God himself'!

“Is the English rendering 'The Word was God *really* qualitative?”

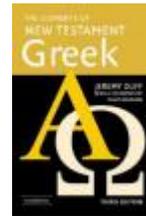
No scholars in the whole world have translated the verse as Witnesses have, as far as Mantey knew. Apparently, that wasn't very far. The

expression "a god" appears as early as 1808 in *The New Testament, in An Improved Version, Upon the Basis of Archbishop Newcome's New Translation: With a Corrected Text*, London, as well as the *Emphatic Diaglott*, the German translations of Becker and Schulz. Many more translations have 'the Word was divine,' which corresponds much more closely in meaning to the *New World Translation* than to the traditional rendering. Of course it may be that some of these translations were made after Mantey wrote this piece.

Are the reasons for rejecting 'a god' at John 1:1c grammatical or theological?

“Is their preferred reading based on grammar, or on theology?”

J. W. Wenham, in *The Elements of New Testament Greek*, writes: “As far as grammar alone is concerned, such a sentence could be printed θεος εστιν ο λογος [theos estin ho logos], which would mean either, 'The Word is a god', or, 'The Word



is the god'. The interpretation of John 1.1 will depend upon whether the writer is held to believe in only one God or in more than one god." (page 35). Thus, *theology* rather than *grammar* is the stated reason for preferring 'The Word was God.'

Note also this admission by C.H. Dodd: "If a translation were a matter of substituting words, a *possible* translation of θεος ην ο λογος [theos en ho logos]; would be "*The Word was a god*". As a *word-for-word translation it cannot be faulted*, and to pagan Greeks who heard early Christian language, θεος ην ο λογος [theos en ho logos] might have seemed a perfectly sensible statement, in that sense ... The reason why it is unacceptable is that it runs counter to the current of Johannine thought, and indeed of Christian thought as a whole." -[Technical Papers for The Bible Translator](#), Vol 28, No.1, January 1977.

It is clear that C.H. Dodd, a scholar well known for his work on the *New English Bible*, is objecting to the rendering 'a god' on the basis of *theology* rather than *grammar*. Below I will consider the theological arguments presented by Mantey.



If the Greek article occurred with both Word and God in John 1:1 the implication would be that they are one and the same person, absolutely identical. But John affirmed that "the Word was with (the) God" (the definite article preceding each noun), and in so writing he indicated his belief that they are distinct and separate personalities. Then John next stated that the Word was God, i.e., of the same family or essence that characterizes

the Creator. Or, in other words, that both are of the same nature, and the nature is the highest in existence, namely divine.

Actually, Mantey is reading far more into the expression than it actually states. True, *θεος* (*theos*) in this verse is used qualitatively, but that does not prove that Christ is of the same 'family or essence that characterizes the Creator'. (It's not clear what he means by 'family' here.) Note what Mantey himself said above: "whenever an article does not precede a noun in Greek, that noun can either be considered as emphasizing the *character, nature, essence or quality* of a person or thing." 'Character, nature, essence or quality' has become 'family or essence' - which is a considerably narrower concept. Mantey has moved the goalposts! What is proved is that Christ is *divine*, that is, in the same class as God.

Examples where the noun in the predicate does not have an article, as in the above verse, are: John 4:24, "God is spirit," (not a spirit); I John 4:16, "God is love," (not a love); I John 1:5, "God is light," (not a light); and Matthew 13:39, "the reapers are angels," i.e. they are the type of beings known as angels. In each instance the noun in the predicate was used to describe some quality or characteristics of the subject, whether as to nature or type.

Mantey apparently rejects the *King James Version's* rendering of John 4:23, which states that 'God is a spirit'. Even if that is debatable, are we really to believe that Matthew 13:39 means that the reapers are 'the type of beings known as angels'? Generations of Bible readers have certainly and correctly understood Jesus to be saying that they *are* angels!

The situation is more complex that Mantey makes out. What applies to uncountable nouns, such as love and light, does not necessarily apply to nouns denoting persons. In any case, Romans 2:19 *does* have the expression 'a light' for Greek *phos* without the article. (I checked 13 different English translations. They *all* had 'a light'.) Of course no translation has it at 1 John 1:5; it depends on context.

Note how anarthrous predicate nouns occurring before the verb are translated throughout John's gospel. The following table shows some examples of the exact same grammatical structure found in John 1:1c (the noun is without the article and is before the verb). Mantey implies that they should all be translated qualitatively, rather than indefinitely. Do you agree?

Verse	Greek	New World Translation	King James Version	New International Version
John 4:19	προφητης	a prophet	a prophet	a prophet
John 6:70	διαβολος	a slanderer	a devil	a devil
John 8:44	ανθρωποκτονος	a manslayer	a murderer	a murderer
John 8:44	ψευστης	a liar	a liar	a liar
John 8:48	Σαμαρειτης	a Samaritan	a Samaritan	a Samaritan
John 10:1	κλεπτης	a thief	a thief	a thief
John 18:37	βασιλευς	a king	a king	a king

On the whole, we can agree with Mantey's comment that the anarthrous predicate noun is used to describe some 'quality or characteristics of the subject, whether as to nature or to type.' Let's keep that in mind as we discuss further.

The apostle John in the context of the introduction to his gospel is pulling all the stops out of language to portray not only the deity of Christ but also His equality with the Father.

Actually, leaving aside the expression under discussion (John 1:1), what other 'stops' is John pulling out to portray Christ's deity and his equality with the Father? Certainly, John is emphasizing Christ's *proximity* to the Father ('with God' verse 1, 'bosom position' verse 18) and his great *glory* and superior *position* (although, even then, his glory is said to be *from* a father, therefore received rather than inherent.) But it's a big step from that to saying that he is God.

He states that the Word was in the beginning, that He was with God, that He was God and that all creation came into existence through Him and that not even one thing exists which was not created by Christ. What else could be said that John did not say?

When Mantey says 'He states that ... He was God,' as part of his argument, then that is *petitio principii*, i.e. begging the question. He's assuming as true what he is seeking to prove. That's a circular argument and can be dismissed immediately.

True, 'all creation came into existence through him [Greek: δι' αυτου, *di' autou*]. Interestingly, verse 17 says that the Law was given *through* Moses [δια Μωησεως, *dia Mouseos*]. Same Greek preposition, δια, *dia*. Just as Moses was not the *source* of the Law, but rather its mediator, similarly Christ is not the ultimate source of creation, but rather the one *through whom* creation took place.

In John 1:18 he explained that Christ had been so intimate with the Father that He was in His bosom and that He came to earth to exhibit or portray God.

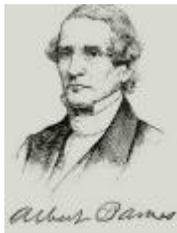
True enough, but *intimacy* does not prove *equality* or *deity*. So the point is irrelevant.

But if we had no other statement from John except that which is found in John 14:9, "He that has seen me has seen the Father," that would be enough to satisfy the seeking soul that Christ and God are the same in essence and that both are divine and equal in nature.

“The 'Invisible Interpreter' at work”

This is a case of the 'invisible interpreter' at work. No-one who heard Jesus say those words would go away and think: "Oh yes. Jesus meant that he and God are the same in essence, both divine and equal in nature." That is pure fantasy on the part of Mantey. The term *essence* isn't even used in the Bible; it's a post-biblical concept. The expression 'divine nature', on the other hand, *is* used in the Bible, in 2 Peter 1:4, where it is used of the experience of Christians taken to heaven. Thus it can hardly be said to mean *equality* with God.

Albert Barnes' notes say concerning John 14:9: "*Hath seen the Father*. This cannot refer to the *essence* or *substance* of God, for he is invisible, and in that respect no man has seen God at any time. All that is meant when it is said that *God is seen*, is, that some *manifestation* of Him has been made; or some such *exhibition* as that we may learn his *character*, his *will*, and his *plans*. . . . The knowledge of the Son was itself, of course, the knowledge of the Father. There was such an intimate *union* in their nature and design, that he who understood the one did also the other." (Albert Barnes was a Presbyterian minister.)



Besides, the whole tenor of New Testament revelation points in this direction. Compare Paul's declaration in Colossians 1:19, for instance: "that all the divine fullness should dwell in Him," or the statement in Hebrews 1:3, "He is the reflection of God's glory and the perfect representation of His being, and continues to uphold the universe by His mighty word." (Williams translation).

Colossians 1:19 actually states that Christ would have divine fullness dwelling in him because "it pleased the Father" to give it to him - not because it was something inherent in him. So that rather argues against Mantey's point. If Jesus *were* God, he would have had such divine fullness anyway.

Likewise, Hebrews 1:3 is not incompatible with the view that Christ is God's created Son. He *reflects* God's glory; he is not the source of that glory, as we already noted in John 1:14.

And note the sweeping, cosmic claim recorded in Matthew 28:19, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and earth."

Yes, that is what Jesus said. *Given*. By whom? When? And what was his position before 'all authority' was given him? (God always has had, and always will have, all authority.) This verse actually disproves Mantey's point.

And, if we contrast with that the belittling implication that Christ was only a god, do we not at once detect the discord? Does not such a conception conflict with the New Testament message both in whole and in part? Why, if John, in the midst of the idolatry of his day, had made such a statement would not the first century hearers and readers have gotten a totally inadequate picture of Christ, who we believe, is the Creator of the universe and the only Redeemer of humanity?

Julius Robert Mantey, A.B., Thd.D., PH.D., D.D.

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“ Will I really go to hell for reading the *New World Translation*? ”

Thus, an analysis of Mantey's objection to the translation 'a god' shows it to be basically theologically motivated. His *grammatical* objections are not shared by all other scholars and are in any case easily disproved by an examination of verses with parallel grammatical structures, as seen above. But the main thrust of his objection is basically *theological* - it conflicts with his own ideas about who Jesus is and his understanding of other NT texts. Mantey apparently said in an interview that he believes that those who allow themselves to be misled by Jehovah's Witnesses will end up in hell! The article commented on above reflects such emotionalism. It is not a good reflection of the scholarly work of which Mantey was undoubtedly eminently capable. Of course, Mantey, is entitled to have his opinion. But more relevant and important than his *opinion* is what he can *prove*. And, in this piece at least, he has not proved his point.

## Miscellaneous Questions about the *New World Translation*.



this." Abbot-Smith's lexicon defines 'vuv, nun' as "Now, presently...presently, forthwith, ...now, therefore, now, however, as it is..." Arndt and Gingrich's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, 1957 edition, on page 547, under the word 'nun' says: "[nun] used w. other articles...απα vuv, ['ara nun'] so or thus now Ro.8:1."

**Context:** It is clear that the 'now' in the Greek of this verse has the sense of 'as it is' or 'therefore'. Under the Law of Moses, God's worshippers were subject to condemnation, now, however, since Christ is the end of the Law, under Christ, there is no such condemnation. - See Romans 7:6.

**Other Translations:** The New English Bible translates the passage in question: "The conclusion of the matter is this: there is no condemnation for those who are united with Christ." Likewise, Goodspeed's translation reads: "So there is no condemnation any more for those who are in union with Christ Jesus."

There are at least a dozen other English translations that don't use the word 'now' in this verse. Surely they haven't all 'deliberately missed out' the word!

In any case, the omission or inclusion of the word 'now' in English makes no real difference to the meaning. Since the verb is in the present tense (there is) the reference is obviously to the present time. Jehovah's Witnesses don't dispute that the verse applies now, as some appear to think. Commenting on this verse, one of our publications says: "They [Christians] are no longer condemned sinners, in the way of death." (*Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, page 249)

**What we learn:** Before jumping to conclusions about a particular rendering, it's good to look the Greek words up in one or more authoritative lexicons. We can spare ourselves much embarrassment that way, as we begin to realise that there is more than one way to translate a particular word or expression.

### *Minding or Meaning*

In Romans 8:6, the New World Translation renders the Greek word '*phronema*' as 'minding' but in verse 27, as 'meaning'. The Kingdom Interlinear Translation defines '*phronema*' as 'minding' in both cases. Why are different words used in the English New World Translation to translate the same original Greek word?

**Other translations:** First let us say that the *New World Translation* is by no means unique in using this expression. The *New English Bible* (1960) and the *Revised English Bible* (1990) both use the expression 'God knows ... what the Spirit means.' William Barclay, in his *New Testament*, uses similar wording.

Good translation does not necessarily require that the same English word be used every time a particular Hebrew or Greek word is used. Precisely the same phenomena are found in many other translations. For example, the King James Version translates the Greek word 'λογος, *logos*' as account, cause, communication, intent, manner, thing, question, reason, fame, rumour, tidings, saying, show, speech, treatise, utterance, and word. I make that 17 different ways of translating the same Greek word! But there is nothing particularly wrong with that. It all depends on the context.

**Context:** In this case, the same Greek word is used in different contexts. Verse 6 is talking about human minds and what they think about. The translation 'minding' is appropriate. But verse 27 is talking about God's spirit and its purpose or meaning. I understand this passage to be saying that when we don't know what to pray for, God's spirit makes it possible for us to pray nonetheless, and God will understand the meaning or purpose of our prayers,

φρόνημα

because of the spirit's help. As commentator Heinrich Meyer puts it, "God would in every case know the purpose of the Spirit."

It's obvious that this rendering, while different from that of many other translations, is legitimate.

**What we learn:** Consistency in translation doesn't always mean one English word for each Greek word.

## God in Christ?

**In 2 Corinthians 5:19, the interlinear rendering of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* says "God was *in* Christ," yet the *New World Translation of the same verse* says "God was *by means of* Christ". Is this a deliberate mistranslation to avoid the conclusion that God dwells in Christ?**

**Lexicons:** The Greek word in 2 Corinthians 5:19 that some feel should be translated as 'in', rather than 'by means of', is 'εν, *en*'. Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon gives the following possible meanings for the word 'εν, *en*': in, at, on, upon, in the number, amongst, in the presence of, before, within, according to, in accordance with, with, by, by means of, etc (and that's just the abridged version!)

**Other translations:** Similarly, the King James Version translates the Greek preposition 'en' as 'by' in Matthew 12:24 ("by Beelzebub"), Luke 11:19 ("by

whom"), also as 'through' in John 17:17 ("through thy truth") - see also John 17:19; 20:31, where the King James Version translates 'εν, en' as 'through').



The Greek preposition 'en' can mean 'in', but it can just as well mean 'by means of', showing agency. It certainly doesn't have to mean that God was 'in' Christ in the sense of residing in him or being inside him. It can and does mean that God through Christ was working out his will. As Romans 5:10 says: "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son".

Interestingly, the *Good News Translation* (formerly known as *Today's English Version*) renders the verse: "God was making all human beings his friends through Christ."

So the NWT is not "deliberately mistranslating"; it is simply using a different and equally correct rendering.

**What we learn:** Critics who don't know the original languages would do well to refrain from using expressions like 'deliberately mistranslating'. Otherwise they risk giving the impression of being presumptuous and immodest. Even for those who know the original languages, accusations of deliberate mistranslation should be a last resort.

### 'Was' or 'Meant'?

**In 1 Corinthians 10:4, the interlinear rendering of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* says "the rock-mass ... was the Christ." So why does the *New World Translation* read "that rock-mass meant the Christ"?**

Again, we have to realise that words frequently have not just one meaning but a range of meaning. The word translated 'meant' in 1 Corinthians 10:4 is a form of the Greek 'eimi', literally meaning 'to be', but also, by extension, meaning 'to stand for, mean, represent.' That is the sense in which it is used in 1 Corinthians 10:1

**Lexicons:** A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament says under EIMI: "2. Explicative, as in parable, figure, type, etc.: Mt 13:19ff; 1 Cor.9:2, 10:4, 11:25, Ga.4:24, Re.17:15". Note that 1 Corinthians 10:4 is here cited as a case where 'eimi' is used in a figurative sense.

A look at the verses cited in the above lexicon should be enough to convince us that 'eimi' does not always literally mean 'to be'. A person is not literally a seed; he/she is represented by a



seed. People are not literally a seal; they are like a seal. A cup is not literally a covenant; it stands for a covenant. The two women are not literally two covenants; they represent two covenants. The waters are not literally peoples; they stand for peoples, etc.

Look also at what W. E. Vine's *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* says about 1 Corinthians 10:4. "PETRA...denotes a mass of rock, as distinct from PETROS, a detached stone or boulder, or a stone that might be thrown or easily moved. ....1 Cor.10:4 (twice), figuratively, of Christ." Note that Vine describes the use as 'figurative'. So the word 'meant' is a suitable translation for the Greek ἦν, *en* in 1 Corinthians 10:4.

**Context:** Christ is certainly not a literal piece of rock, but he *was* represented by the rock mass from which the Israelites drank in the desert.

Any connection to Deuteronomy 32:4 is rather tentative. When Moses describes Jehovah as 'the Rock', he is not referring to the incidents when Israel drank water from a rock. 1 Corinthians 10:4, on the other hand, is referring to those incidents, when it says they 'drank' from the rock. They didn't drink from Jehovah himself but from a literal rock mass.

**What we learn:** It is enlightening to look throughout the New Testament to get a feel for the range of meaning of a particular Greek word.

### 'I am' or 'I have been'?

According to the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* (interlinear reading), Jesus said at John 8:58, "Before Abraham to become, I am". But the *New World Translation* reads, "Before Abraham came to be, I have been." Surely this is a mistranslation to avoid giving the impression that Jesus is Jehovah, who identifies himself in Exodus 3:14 as "I am".

Actually, "I am" and "I have been" are legitimate translations of the Greek εἶμι, *ego eimi*. Where we would use the present perfect tense ('I have been'),

Ἐγώ εἶμι

Greek uses the present tense. This isn't unique to Greek; the majority of European languages do the same thing; it's English that's the 'odd man out'. When you talk about an action that began in the past and continues into the present time, in Greek

you use the present tense. J. H. Moulton's *Grammar of New Testament Greek* states: "The Present which indicates the continuance of an action during the past and up to the moment of speaking is virtually the same as Perfective, the only difference being that the action is conceived as still in progress (Burton §

17). It is frequent in the NT: Luke 2:48; 13:7; 15:29; Jn 5:6; 8:58; 14:9; 15:27; Acts 15:21; 26:31; 2 Cor. 12:19, 2 Ti. 3:18; 2 Pt. 3:4; 1 Jn 2:9; 3:8."

Note that Moulton includes John 8:58 in this category.

By the way, in John 14:9, the vast majority of translations, including the *King James Version*, translate 'εἰμι, *eimi*' as 'have been'. With equal justification, the New World Translation renders 'εἰμι, *eimi*' as 'have been' in John 8:58.

**What we learn:** Greek is not English. They have different grammatical structures and different tenses. One Greek tense does not correspond to one English tense. You have to consider the context.

### 'Cross' or 'Stake'?

The Appendix to the *Kingdom Interlinear*, on page 1150, presents an illustration taken from Justus Lipsius of the 16th century of Jesus crucified on a stake or 'crux simplex'. The 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear* on page 1155 states: "We represent herewith a photographic copy of his illustration on page 647, column 2, of his book *De Cruce Liber Primus*. This is the manner in which Jesus was impaled." Is it proper to use a picture so dogmatically? Furthermore, Lipsius also has other pictures of executions on crosses (with cross beams). Lipsius even said: "When a man, hands stretched out, worships God with a pure heart he resembles a cross." And in John 20:25, the word 'nails' (plural) is used.

The *Kingdom Interlinear* does not say that Lipsius' drawing is intended as proof of how Jesus died, but only to illustrate the type of instrument used by the Romans to execute him. It should be obvious that a 16th century scholar can not be an authoritative source of information about something that happened in the 1st century. All the *Kingdom Interlinear* says is that the method illustrated in the photograph "is the manner in which Jesus was impaled". In that context (a mere illustration rather than a piece of evidence) Lipsius' own view is irrelevant. Abundant evidence is provided in the Appendix that the Greek word *stauros* originally meant 'stake. Indeed, that is the basic meaning found in most lexicons.

σταυρός

We can not be dogmatic about how many nails were used in Jesus' hands on the basis of 'scripture alone'. True, John 20:25 mentions 'nails' (plural) but that could refer to nails in his hands and feet, not just his hands. (In Luke 24:39, he told his disciples to look, not just at his hands but also at his feet.) In any case, it is understood that illustrations in our publications are just artists'

impressions. None of us were there at Jesus' execution, and the Bible doesn't describe it in detail, so we simply don't know many of the details.

What is really surprising is that some people think that the number of nails used is a matter of sufficient importance even to discuss.

For a further discussion of how the Greek word 'σταυρός, stauros' should be translated, please see the [Defense of the New World Translation](#) website.

## Qualified to Pass Judgment?

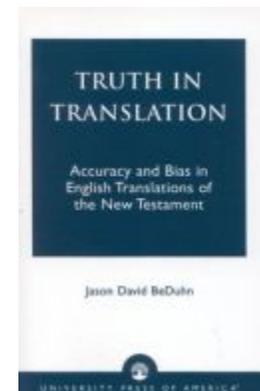
In his book *Truth in Translation*, Jason BeDuhn states:

In order to have any ability to make a judgement about the accuracy of a translation of the New Testament from its original Greek into modern English, you have to know how to read Greek ... I am sure this seems obvious to you. Yet, amazingly, the majority of individuals who publicly pass judgement on Bible translations -- in print, on television and radio, on the internet, and in letters they send to me -- do not know how to read Greek.

Does that sound familiar?! He continues:

The obvious question to be asked here is: then how can they tell what is a good translation and what is not? The fact is that they cannot. Their opinions are based not on the accuracy of translating Greek words into English words, but on the agreement of the final product with their own beliefs about what the Bible must say ...

So the first question you should ask anyone who claims to have the credentials to speak about the translation of the New Testament is: Do you know how to read Koine Greek? If not, then you have no basis to render an opinion, other than to rely on other people who do read Koine Greek. If we Greek readers disagree among ourselves, then you must examine our arguments and evidence and decide who has the better case. (Page xvii)



Beduhn isn't a Jehovah's Witness, and actually disagrees with a number of translation decisions made by the NWT translation committee. This book

provides more accurate information than all the sum of all the anti-Witness books and websites, which, as you can see for yourself, are all too often prejudiced and plain wrong. If Witness critics want to be taken seriously, they really do need to be a lot more careful about using emotive expressions such as 'biased', 'missing out' words, 'deliberately mistranslating', 'changing the Bible', etc.

Beduhn's book is worth a read:

<http://www.amazon.co.uk/exec/obidos/ASIN/0761825568/>

## Summary

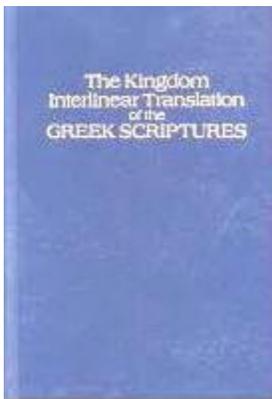
Just because the *New World Translation* is different in certain verses from some other translations doesn't make it automatically wrong.

- Words can have more than one meaning.
- Phrases can often be translated more than one way.
- More often than not, you'll find that at least some other translations agree with the *New World Translation*.
- Don't be hasty to condemn the *New World Translation* as incorrect, or to impute bad motives to its translators. Look into it. Get out dictionaries, check other translations, ask people who speak the Bible languages. Have an open mind. You may not agree in all cases with the *NWT* rendering. But at least you'll understand *why* the translation choice was made and will know *why* you disagree.

## The *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* and the Deception of "MacGregor Ministries"

*In three parts for easier reading*

On the MacGregor "Ministries" website (hereafter referred to as "MacGregor"), there is an article entitled "How Reliable is the Kingdom Interlinear Bible Translation?"<sup>[1]</sup> The page does not state who its author is or what his or her qualifications are to assess the reliability of a Bible translation. However, we can get an idea of how well (or, how badly) the author understands the issues by analyzing what he or she has written.



Firstly, the site perpetuates the old myth of the 'spontaneously produced Bible translation', a theory about as probable as the spontaneous generation of life. It states that the "New World Translation was done without any Greek or Hebrew scholars", an extraordinary assertion, considering that the translators of the *New World Translation* were anonymous. In reality, MacGregor couldn't possibly know the scholarly abilities or qualifications of anyone involved in the production of the *New World Translation*. Is it really so difficult to believe that an organization made up of millions of people from all different parts of the world should have in its ranks persons capable of translating the Bible? Surely a group the size of Jehovah's Witnesses has the resources to train the relatively small number of people needed to handle matters of original-language scholarship and Bible translation? For a further discussion of this point, see the article '[Hommel and the New World Translation](#)'.

### Concealing the Truth

MacGregor Ministries' website contains extracts from the preface to the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*, in which it attempts to give the impression that the translators have made commitments that they are not keeping. Specifically, the site seeks to convince its readers that the Watch Tower Society has promised to use the same English word in the translation every time any given Greek word is used in the original - something which no English translation has ever done and which is basically impossible. Note how deceitful editing gives a false impression of what the KIT actually says:

What the <i>Kingdom Interlinear</i> says according to MacGregor Ministries:	The complete text of what the <i>Kingdom Interlinear</i> actually says:
"We offer no paraphrase of the Scriptures"...	We offer no paraphrase of the Scriptures. Our endeavor throughout has been to give as literal a translation as possible <b>where the modern English idiom allows for it or where the thought content is not hidden due to any awkwardness in the literal rendition.</b>
"nearly as possible word for word, the exact statement of the original"...	In this way, we can best meet the desire of those who are scrupulous for getting as nearly as possible word for word, the exact statement of the original.
To each major word we have assigned one meaning and have held to that meaning..."	To each major word we have assigned one meaning and have held to that meaning <b>as far as the context permitted.</b>

Has the MacGregor site been honest in its quotation of the *Kingdom Interlinear* preface? Note that the *Interlinear* preface qualifies the translation principle of a literal, word-for-word rendering with the caveat that this is done *where modern English idiom allows for it, where the thought content is not hidden due to any awkwardness in the literal rendition, and as far as the context permitted*. All three of these qualifying expressions are omitted from MacGregor's edited version of the preface. Later in the article, it attacks the NWT, asking:

What happened to their promise to assign one meaning to one word and stick with it? Apparently this only works when it is not exposing their false teachings!

Here, they are attacking a straw man. The *New World Translation Committee* never promised to use only one English word for each different Greek word, but only stated that it had attempted to do so where the context permitted and the meaning of the original was not hidden. As will be shown throughout this essay, these principles have been followed faithfully by the *New World Translation*.

### Examining Individual Cases

Let us now examine some of the assertions made by MacGregor about the Kingdom Interlinear Translation, to determine whether they stand up to scrutiny. Please note that all direct quotations from the MacGregor Ministries' website in this chapter are in blue for easy identification.

#### John 8:58

Like many critics of the NWT, MacGregor takes issue with its rendering of John 8:58:

Jesus said to them: "Most truly I say to YOU, Before Abraham came into existence, I have been."

Let us look at the matter of the tense labeling first. MacGregor complains:

The footnote in the 1969 purple-cover edition of the KIT states that the "I have been" is "properly rendered in the perfect tense." However, in the 1985 (sic) Navy-Blue-cover edition, the footnote states that "I have been" is "properly translated by the perfect indicative" (tense).

So far, so good. But then, advertising their ignorance of fairly elementary grammatical terminology, they go on to protest:

Wouldn't true scholars KNOW the correct tense? Here the Watchtower has presented two different tenses for the same words. Which is wrong? Which is right? Actually they made three stabs at choosing a tense. In the 1950 NWT of the Christian Greek Scriptures the Watchtower "translators" claimed John 8:58 was in the "perfect indefinite tense". All three tries are WRONG, according to Greek Scholars. The correct tense is the present tense, and the correct translation is "I am", not "I have been".

Two different tenses? Is the perfect tense a different tense from the perfect indicative? Both are the same tense - the perfect. The word 'indicative' is a grammatical term that relates to mood, not to tense. When grammarians talk of the "perfect indicative", they mean the perfect *tense*<sup>[2]</sup>, indicative *mood*.<sup>[3]</sup> The two terms are not mutually exclusive; one is simply more specific than the other. So, both versions of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* are saying the same thing, namely, that εγω ειμι (*ego eimi*) should be translated into English by "I have been".<sup>[4]</sup>

Ἐγώ εἰμι

Incidentally, the footnotes referred to in both editions of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* are talking about the English tense used, not the Greek<sup>[5]</sup>, which, as the NWT translators were well aware, is the present tense.

MacGregor further criticizes the 1950 edition of the *New World Translation*, stating that the Watchtower 'translators' [inverted commas in original] claimed John 8:58 was in the 'perfect indefinite tense'. But MacGregor's statement is in error. The 1950 edition of the NWT clearly does not state that the *Greek* of John 8:58 is in the perfect indefinite tense. What it actually says is that the phrase has been "rendered in the perfect indefinite tense". Likewise, the 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* says that *ego eimi* is "properly *rendered* in the perfect tense." The verb "rendered", of course, means "translated". Thus, the 1985 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* says that the action expressed by this verb is "properly translated by the perfect indicative." Once again, MacGregor is attributing to the translators a position that they never held and refuting that position - another 'strawman' argument.

The translators of the NWT were fully aware that εγω ειμι is a present-tense verb in Greek and at no time asserted the contrary.<sup>[6]</sup> This may be seen from the appendix to the 1985 Edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation*, which clearly differentiates between the tense used in the original Greek and the tense used in the translation:

Εγί, which is the first-person singular **present indicative**, is properly translated by the **perfect indicative**. (page 1145; emphasis added)

MacGregor asks:

Why do they "translate" the words "ego eimi" as "I have been" in this verse (John 8:58, when, if you turn back two pages to John 8:18, 23, 24 and 28 you will see examples where "ego eimi" is translated correctly by them, as "I am".

The correct translation of εγω ειμι in John 8:58 is the subject of **another essay on this site**. Suffice it to say here that Greek often uses the present tense to describe an action that began in the past and continues into the present. English does not do this, and hence the use of the present perfect is appropriate in English.

Of course, the examples of 'ego eimi' in John 8:18, 23, 24, 28 are found in a different grammatical context. None of them are accompanied by an expression of past time, such as that found at John 8:58, namely "before Abraham came into existence" or "before Abraham was" (KJV) Is MacGregor being disingenuous or just naive? You decide.

Interestingly, although the MacGregor website has a scanned copy of the footnote from the 1985 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear*, it does not present the footnote for the 1969 edition.

Here is the scan of John 8:58 from the 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear*, the exact scan that appeared on the MacGregor Ministries Website:

εχεις	και	'Αβραάμ	έώρακας;
you are having	and	Abraham	you have seen?
58 ειπεν	αυτοις	'Ιησους	'Αμην αμην
Said	to them	Jesus	Amen amen
λέγω	υμιν,	πριν	'Αβραάμ γενέσθαι
I am saying	to you	Before	Abraham to become
έγω ειμί.	59	ήραν	ουν λίθους
I am.		They lifted up	therefore stones
ινα	βάλωσιν	έπ'	αυτόν.
in order that	they might throw	upon	him;

And here is the footnote from *the very same page* of the 1969 Kingdom Interlinear, which MacGregor must have decided to cut out of the scanned page:

58<sup>a</sup> I have been=ἐγὼ εἰμί (*e-go' ei-mi'*) after the a'orist infinitive clause πρὶν Ἀβραὰμ γενέσθαι and hence properly rendered in the perfect tense. It is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn'*, meaning "The Being" or "The I Am") at Exodus 3:14, LXX.

The 1969 edition points out in its footnote to John 8:58: "It is not the same as ὁ ὢν (*ho ohn'*, meaning 'The Being' or 'The I Am') at Exodus 3:14, LXX."

This is significant because of what MacGregor goes on to say:

Numerous translations and Bible scholars correctly cross-reference this verse with Exodus 3:14 which reveals the divine name for God as "I AM". The Watchtower Society could not have its followers believing the revealing words of Jesus over their false doctrine. Jesus really is the "I AM".

Perhaps it is now apparent why MacGregor has excised the footnote from its scan of the 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear*. They could not include it without publishing the Watch Tower Society's clear and powerful refutation of their own argument that John 8:58 is a reference to Exodus 3:14. For a discussion of whether John 8:58 is an allusion to Exodus 3:14, please see [this thought-provoking analysis](http://www.scripturaltruths.com/jesus/iam/) found on <http://www.scripturaltruths.com/jesus/iam/>.

Finally, reflecting the views of many other NWT critics, McGregor asks:

Why have they changed the plain statement by Jesus Christ that He is the "I Am"?

Of course, there is no "plain statement" by Jesus that he is the "I am". Think about it. McGregor uses reported speech: "the plain statement by Jesus that he is the 'I Am'". How would you turn that into direct speech? "Jesus said that he is the 'I Am' in *reported speech*, would become "I am the 'I Am'" in *direct speech*. But Jesus did not say: "I am the 'I Am'." The expression 'I am' occurs only once in the Greek of John 8:58, not twice.

Jason Beduhn and Rob Bowman have conducted an online debate about the correct translation of John 8:58. Read about it here: <http://jessicacarter.blogspot.com/>.

### John 17:3 - taking in knowledge

John 17:3 in the New World Translation reads:

This means everlasting life, their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ

MacGregor comments:

The NWT says "taking in knowledge of you" BUT the Greek text in the KIT says something quite different... "they may be knowing you." We need to know God through Jesus Christ in order to have everlasting life. All the knowledge in the world will not save us.

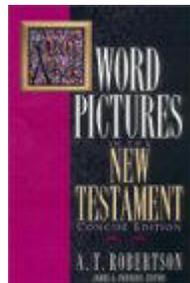
Firstly, it should be noted that the New World Translation committee has not tried to hide the fact that the Greek text basically says 'knowing you'. Indeed, the footnote of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures - With References reads: "Or, their knowing you." So there is nothing underhand about it. Note the

γινώσκω

comments by well-known and respected scholars:

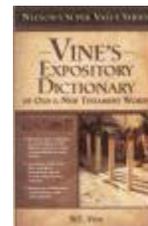
W. E. Vine: "GINOSKO (γινώσκω) signifies **to be taking in knowledge**, to come to know, recognize, understand, or to understand completely." [7]

J. H. Moulton: "The present simplex, γινώσκειν, is durative, 'to **be taking in knowledge**.'" [8]



A. T. Robertson: Should know (ginoskosin). Present active subjunctive with hina (subject clause), "should **keep on knowing**." [9]

We see, then, that McGregor Ministries' criticism of the NWT reading is entirely unjustified.



### John 20:28 - Is Jesus Given the Title 'ho theos'?

The Macgregor website refers to John 20:28, which reads in the *New World Translation* much the same as it does in the King James Version and other translations: "My Lord and my God."

Since this is not a translation issue, despite the fact that it appears on the page, "How Reliable is the Kingdom Interlinear Bible Translation?", we shall confine ourselves to a brief comment on MacGregor's assertion:

The JW argument is that the Greek term "Ho Theos" (The God) always refers to Jehovah God, whereas "Theos" without the definite article "Ho"

could be just Jesus. Yet, In John 20:28, we have the disciple Thomas exclaiming to the risen Christ.

Is this true? Do Jehovah's Witnesses claim that "the Greek term 'Ho Theos' (The God) always refers to Jehovah God"? Note the subtle difference between the above statement of MacGregor and the quotation they proceed to make from *The Watchtower*,

The Watchtower magazine of July 1, 1986 (sic), page 31 claims in a footnote that.

*"The title ho theos (the God, or God), which now designates the Father as a personal reality, is not applied in the N(ew) T(estament) to Jesus Himself; Jesus is the Son of God (of ho theos)..."*

Now, for good measure, let's look at the *full* quotation, as it was printed in *The Watchtower*, July 1, 1986:

"The title *ho theos* [the God, or God], which now designates the Father as a personal reality, is not applied in the New Testament to Jesus Himself; Jesus is the Son of God (of *ho theos*). . . . Jn 1:1 should rigorously be translated 'the word was with the God [=the Father], and the word was a divine being.'"—*Dictionary of the Bible* (1965), by John L. McKenzie, S.J.

ὁ θεός μου

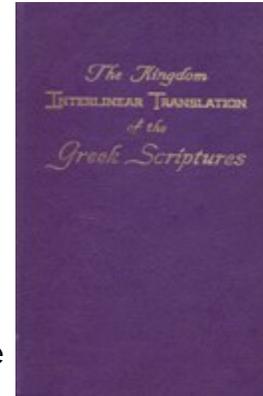
Leaving aside for a moment the possibility that Thomas's words were not directed at Jesus but at God<sub>[10]</sub>, there are still certain important observations to make:

1. MacGregor omits to mention that this is not merely the opinion of *The Watchtower* but that of the Jesuit scholar John L. McKenzie who made the above statement. This type of selective quotation certainly casts considerable doubt on MacGregor's objectivity and intellectual honesty.
2. McKenzie did not state that "the Greek term 'Ho Theos' always refers to Jehovah God", as MacGregor asserts. He actually refers to the **title** *ho theos*. There is a subtle but important difference. *Ho theos* is not a title at John 20:28.

When 2 Corinthians 4:4 refers to the Devil as ο θεος του αιωνος τουτου (*ho theos tou aionos toutou*), clearly the reference is not to God. The expression *ho theos* (God or the god) is qualified by a genitive phrase *του αιωνος τουτου*, 'of this world/age/system'. Hence it is not a title but rather explains the

position occupied by the Devil in relation to this world, namely, that he is its god.<sup>[11]</sup>

Similarly, John 20:28 has ο θεός followed by a genitive, in this case μου (*mou*, of me, or my). Therefore it is not a title, but rather shows the position occupied by the one addressed in relation to Thomas, i.e. he was God (or a god) to Thomas.



The presence of the definite article (ho) before theos in John 20:28 need not be taken as proof that Jesus is God (*ho theos*). Scholars generally recognize that Koine Greek can use an articular noun<sup>[12]</sup> in the nominative case *instead of a vocative*. This is done particularly under the influence of the Hebrew language, which employs a similar form of address. Daniel Wallace, who is a conservative Greek scholar, classified John 20:28 as nominative-for-vocative, "most likely due to Semitic influence".<sup>[13]</sup>

Hence the fact that the expression *ho theos* is used by Thomas in John 20:28 does not prove that Jesus is Almighty God.

### Colossians 1:26 - "mystery"

MacGregor objects to the *New World Translation's* use of the expression 'sacred secret' in Colossians 1:26 and elsewhere, stating:

"Jehovah's Witnesses do not like to hear the term "mystery" in connection with God, as they claim God is no mystery to them!"

and adds

"Why do they not want Jehovah's Witnesses to know that there is mystery about God?"

μυστήριον

If there is a mystery here, it is where MacGregor Ministries got this idea from. This is a particularly odd criticism of the NWT, and not one that is encountered frequently. Perhaps that is because it is so obviously false.

One of the organization's most famous books, published in 1917, was entitled "The Finished Mystery". Another book, published in 1969, bore the title: "Then is Finished the Mystery of God."<sup>[14]</sup>

Let's look at how a number of versions render the Greek word μυστηριον, *mysterion* at Colossians 1:26.

Analytical-Literal Translation	secret
Bible in Basic English	secret

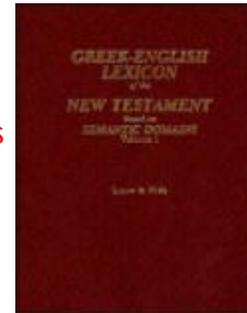
German <i>Elberfelder Bible</i>	das Geheimnis (the secret)
German Luther Bible	das Geheimnis (the secret)
Good News Translation	secret
Goodspeed New Testament	secret
International Standard Version	secret
Weymouth	truth which has been kept secret
Young's New Testament	the secret that hath been hid

Now let's look at how some lexicons define  $\mu\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\upsilon\omicron\nu$ , *mysterion*:

BDAG: The Pauline lit. has m. in 21 places. A *secret or mystery*, too profound for human ingenuity

UBS Lexicon: *secret, mystery* (of something formerly unknown but now revealed)

Louw-Nida Lexicon: the content of that which has not been known before but which has been revealed to an in-group or restricted constituency - '*secret, mystery.*' ... *There is a serious problem involved in translating  $\mu\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\upsilon\omicron\nu$  by a word which is equivalent to the English expression 'mystery,' for this term in English refers to a secret which people have tried to uncover but which they have failed to understand.* In many instances  $\mu\sigma\tau\eta\rho\iota\upsilon\omicron\nu$  is translated by a phrase meaning 'that which was not known before,' with the implication of its being revealed at least to some persons.



In view of the fact that the word 'secret' is used by many other translations and appears alongside 'mystery' in reputable Bible lexicons, it is difficult to see what MacGregor's point is. Apparently they are simply hoping that their readers will not check any other translations or any Greek lexicons. Their *argument from ignorance* is a very weak argument indeed!

"Yet these men are abusive in matters of which they know nothing" -  
Jude 10, *Weymouth*.

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[1] After much thought I have decided not to link to this site as it contains material not only critical of the *New World Translation* but also extremely inflammatory and slanderous material that assails the good reputation of Jehovah's Witnesses in the community, thus contributing to religious discrimination and hatred against Jehovah's Witnesses. However, readers of

this site can be assured that I have made every effort to give an accurate representation of the site's claims about the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* and have double-checked all quotations made from the page.

[2] Merriam Webster defines the grammatical term "perfect" as "of, relating to, or constituting a verb form or verbal that expresses an action or state completed at the time of speaking or at a time spoken of" (<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=perfect>)

[3] Merriam Webster defines "indicative" as meaning "of, relating to, or constituting a verb form or set of verb forms that represents the denoted act or state as an objective fact <the *indicative* mood>" (<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?book=Dictionary&va=indicative>)

[4] The 1969 edition simply mentions the perfect tense, without specifying the mood. It could safely do this, since the perfect is rarely used in English outside the indicative mood. Nonetheless, the 1985 version improves on this explanation by making it more precise.

[5] This is seen by the fact that the 1969 KIT uses the phrase "properly *rendered* in the perfect tense", the 1985 edition similarly remarking that it is "properly *translated* by the perfect indicative". Both footnotes are dealing with the proper tense to use in English, not what tense is used in the original Greek.

[6] Rolf Furuli in *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation*, page 239, comments on the phrase "perfect indefinite tense", shedding some light on the likely reasons why it was changed in later versions of the NWT. There he states that although "the semantic contents of the phrase may be fitting, and the term can be found in old English grammars, it was not standard grammatical terminology in 1950". This is, however, a very minor criticism.

[7] *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*

[8] *A Grammar of New Testament Greek*

[9] *Word Pictures in the New Testament*, comment on John 17:3.

[10] Hal Flemings pointed out in a letter to a Mr. Marks: "If I saw you tomorrow and said to you: "My God, is that you Ed Marks?", would that be sufficient evidence since I "said to you" in clear terms "My God" that I was acknowledging that you were a God--and not only that but MY God?" (<http://jehovah.to/exe/translation/marks.htm>)

[11] Virtually all English versions recognize that *ho theos* is not a title in 2 Corinthians 4:4, as is seen by the fact that they do not capitalize it.

[12] An articular noun is one that has the Greek article, in this case *ho*.

[13] *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, page 58.

[14] Jehovah's Witnesses do not dispute that there are mysteries. "The Bible does refer to divine mysteries, or sacred secrets. But none of these conflict with clearly stated Scriptural truths." - *Reasoning from the Scriptures*, 1985, page 264.

## The *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* and the Deception of "MacGregor Ministries"

### PART 2

#### Colossians 2:9

Colossians 2:9 reads in the *New World Translation*:

because it is in him that all the fullness of the divine quality dwells  
bodily

Concerning this verse, MacGregor asks in what can only be termed a rant:

"divine quality"?? Where is that found in the Greek! Nowhere! It is a Watchtower invention. In the KIT, under the Greek text, in the purple edition (1969), the word is translated "godship" (Wescott & Hort's correct translation) but in the navy blue edition (1985) the same Greek word becomes "divinity". How dare they take the liberty of altering Greek meanings from edition to edition, when they have no Greek Scholars?

First of all, as we've already pointed out, we *do* have Greek scholars. The existence and quality of the *New World Translation* are ample testimony to that.

Now, about the expressions "divinity," "godship," "divine quality". Is there a major difference between them? All of them basically refer to the state or quality of being either God or a god, as is demonstrated at "The Fullness of the Divine Quality" in Colossians 2:9.

θεότης

In fact, "godship" is not *the* 'correct translation' of Westcott & Hort, as though no other translation were correct. Many respected Greek lexicons have words like godship, divinity, and deity to define the Greek θεότης, *theotes*. The word 'divinity' is defined in authoritative English dictionaries such as Webster's as 'the quality of being divine' - which is just another way of saying 'divine quality'. Thus, the NWT translators have not 'taken the liberty of altering Greek meanings', as MacGregor accuses. In fact, it is MacGregor Ministries that have taken the liberty of falsely bearing witness against the NWT committee without any proof.

A further discussion of Colossians 2:9 can be found in the chapter "The Fullness of the Divine Quality" in Colossians 2:9.

### Revelation 5:10 - over the earth (ἐπι της γης, *epi tes ges*)

Revelation 5:10 in the *New World Translation* reads:

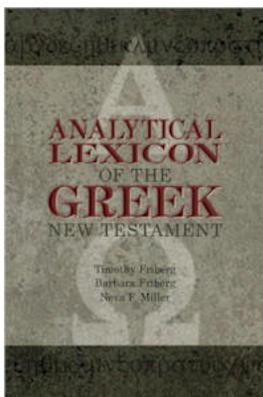
and you made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God, and they are to rule as kings over the earth."

MacGregor comments:

In the Greek text we find this group reigning UPON the earth, but by the time the "translation" makes it to the NWT side of the page, suddenly they are reigning OVER the earth, not UPON it! How come in other places they left the word "upon" as it was? (Rev. 5:13 etc. etc.) It takes another Greek word entirely to mean "OVER". Why the blatant deception?

Again, MacGregor Ministries are overstating their case. It's true that the Greek word ἐπί (*epi*) often does mean 'on,' so 'epi tes ges' could mean 'on (the) earth'. That is why the term appears in the *Kingdom*

ἐπί τῆς γῆς



*Interlinear* at this place. But that is not the only meaning for the preposition. Let's examine how some lexicons define ἐπί, *epi*:

**Friberg Lexicon:** preposition with a basic meaning *on*, but with a wide range of meanings according to the context; I.

with the genitive emphasizing contact; (1) in answer to "where?" *on* (LU 2.14); (2) with verbs of motion answering "to what place? where?" *on, in* (HE 6.7); (3) expressing immediate proximity *at, by, near* (JN 21.1); (4) in legal procedures *in the presence of, before* an official court (AC 25.10); (5) **figuratively, related to rule and authority over (RO 9.5)**; (6) figuratively; (a) as giving a basis *on the basis or evidence of* (1T 5.19); (b) *based on, in view of* (LU 4.25); (7) as relating in historical timing *in the time of, under (the rule of)* (MK 2.26);

Liddell & Scott: **over, of persons in authority**, ο επι των οπλιτων ( ο επι των ιππεων Dem.; ο επι της διοικησεως the paymaster

So, MacGregor's statement that "it takes another Greek word entirely to mean OVER" has been proved to be entirely false.

This is borne out by even the most cursory examination of some verses in the Greek *Septuagint* and the Christian Greek Scriptures where the word *επι, epi*, is used in connection with the verb *βασιλευω, basileuo*:

2 Kings 11:3	και Γοθολια βασιλευουσα επι της γης (LXX) And Athaliah did reign over the land (KJV)
1 Samuel 8:7	εμε εξουδενωκασιν του μη βασιλευειν επ' αυτων (LXX) they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them (KJV)
1 Samuel 16:1	καγω εξουδενωκα αυτον μη βασιλευειν επι Ισραηλ (LXX) I have rejected him from reigning over Israel (KJV)
Luke 19:14	ου θελουμεν τουτον βασιλευσαι εφ' ημας (WH) We will not have this man to reign over us (KJV)

It is apparent from these and numerous other cases that *epe* can be used after *basileuo* with the meaning of "rule over" or "reign over".

Professor Carl Conrad, moderator of the B-Greek scholarly discussion list, has also acknowledged that 'rule over the earth' is a possibility for *epe tes ges* at Revelation 5:10. He states: "EPI is a preposition that has somewhat different meanings depending upon what case it is used with. It basically means 'upon' or 'onto.' With a dative it can even mean 'on top of (x)' in the sense of 'in addition to (x).' With a genitive it tends to mean 'on,' 'upon,' 'over' the area coextensive with the noun in the genitive case: 'And they will be kings upon the surface of the (whole) earth' = 'And they will exercise kingship over the (whole) earth.'" See <http://lists.ibiblio.org/pipermail/b-greek/2000-May/011575.html>

Next, consider some cases where *επί* is translated in this way in the *King James Version*.

Matthew 24:45	over all his household
Acts 6:3	over this business
Acts 8:27	had the charge of

Romans 9:5	over all
Ephesians 4:6	above all
Revelation 11:6	power over waters

Finally, we can examine how a number of other translations have rendered the phrase *epi tes ges* in Revelation 5:10.

Greek	ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ( <i>epi tes ges</i> )
Amplified Bible	over the earth
J. N. Darby	over the earth
Elberfelder Bible (German)	über die Erde (over the earth)
Goodspeed	over the earth
Green's Literal Translation	over the earth
The Message	over the earth
Weymouth	over the earth
Vulgate (Latin)	super terram (over the earth) <sup>[15]</sup>

The falsity of MacGregor's claims can be seen, then, from three points of view:

1. Lexicons give 'over' as an acceptable meaning of *epi*.
2. The King James Version itself frequently translates *epi* as 'over' in contexts relating to authority.
3. Numerous highly respected translations have the same expression as the New World Translation at Revelation 5:10.

### "Worship" or "Obeisance" to Jesus Christ?

Now let us consider MacGregor's assertion that:

The Watchtower's invented term "did obeisance" was given a definition by them, namely,

*"...act of bowing, kneeling, prostrating the body, or making some other gesture to betoken submission; or simply the paying of respect. It adequately translates the Hebrew hishta-chawah' and the Greek pro-sky-ne'o in many cases."* (Insight on the Scriptures, Vol. 2, page 523).

Trouble is, they have no backing by Greek scholars for this invented definition.

Is it true that "did obeisance" is a term 'invented' by the Watch Tower Society, or is this another case of MacGregor Ministries inventing accusations to try to mislead us?

Below we reproduce the definitions of *proskyneo* from a number of Greek lexicons. Judge for yourself whether MacGregor is telling the truth. Any further comment is, frankly, superfluous.

The United Bible Societies (UBS) Lexicon gives the following definitions for *proskuneo*:

worship; fall down and  
worship, kneel, bow low,  
fall at another's feet

ΠΡΟΣΚΥΝΕΩ

The Friberg Lexicon states:

(1) from a basic sense *bow down to kiss* someone's feet, garment hem, or the ground in front of him; (2) in the NT of worship or veneration of a divine or supposedly divine object, expressed concretely with falling face down in front of someone *worship, venerate, do obeisance to*

Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon says:

Plut. :- *to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore, ...*

2. of the Oriental fashion of *making the salam or prostrating oneself before kings and superiors,*

The renowned *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, 3rd edition, (BDAG) gives the following definition:

Freq. used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or someth. holy.) to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.

It adds that such respect is paid:

to human beings, but by this act they are to be recognized as belonging to a superhuman realm ... —Jesus, who is rendered homage as Messianic king and helper.

By now, you may have noticed a difference between what respected lexicographers say about *proskyneo* and what MacGregor is saying.

However, MacGregor does not stop there. The site adds:

Second problem for them is that many dictionaries list "obeisance" as a definition of "worship"!

Which dictionaries? Perhaps they would have been more convincing had they stated their sources. Here are the definitions of 'worship' and 'obeisance' according to four well-known English dictionaries, two American and two British.

Dictionary	Defines Worship	Defines Obeisance
<a href="#">Merriam Webster</a>	<p>2 : reverence offered a divine being or supernatural power; <i>also</i> : an act of expressing such reverence</p> <p>3 : a form of religious practice with its creed and ritual</p>	<p>1 : a movement of the body made in token of respect or submission : <a href="#">BOW</a></p> <p>2 : <a href="#">DEFERENCE</a>, <a href="#">HOMAGE</a></p>
<a href="#">American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language</a>	<p>1a. The reverent love and devotion accorded a deity, an idol, or a sacred object. b. The ceremonies, prayers, or other religious forms by which this love is expressed. 2. Ardent devotion; adoration.</p>	<p>1. A gesture or movement of the body, such as a curtsy, that expresses deference or homage. 2. An attitude of deference or homage.</p>
<a href="#">Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary</a>	<p>1 [T] to have or show a strong feeling of respect and admiration for God or a god:</p> <p>2 [I] to go to a religious ceremony:</p>	<p>obedience and respect, or something you do which expresses this: <i>One by one the noblemen made their obeisances (= bent at the waist) to the Queen.</i></p>

Shorter Oxford Dictionary (not available online)	<p>1. To honour or revere as a supernatural being or power or as a holy thing; to adore with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies. ...</p> <p>2. To honour; to regard or treat with honour or respect; to salute, bow down to.</p>	a respectful salutation; a bow or curtsy
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It seems clear from this sampling of dictionaries that worship and obeisance are separate and distinct concepts.

Plumbing the depths of poor taste and publicizing their ignorance even further, MacGregor Ministries resort to ridicule:

Sometimes the Society just can't keep their deceptions straight with each other! Such an example is Hebrews 1:6 in the Purple KIT. Here they put "obeisance" on the Greek/English side and "worship" on the NWT side! What a hoot! If you're going to mistranslate, at least try to be consistent! They had to scramble around and correct their boo-boo in the 1985 navy-blue edition where they hastily did away with the worship of Jesus.

Thus, MacGregor Ministries apparently feel that the Watch Tower Society simply didn't notice that the left column said obeisance and the right-hand column worship - hardly likely in view of the doctrinal significance of the term. The Watch Tower Society has long recognized the range of meaning of both the Greek verb *proskuneo* and the English verb *worship*, which itself historically meant to bow down. The Society has nothing to hide and to this day has the alternative reading "worship him" in the *New World Translation Reference Bible - With Footnotes*. Unlike MacGregor Ministries, the Watch Tower Society has humbly and reasonably acknowledged that the verb can have more than one meaning. Explaining how that is the case, *The Watchtower* of 15 January 1992 commented:

If one prefers the rendering "worship," such worship is relative, for Jesus told Satan: "It is Jehovah your God you must worship [form of *pro-sky-ne ō*], and it is to him alone you must render sacred service."—Matthew 4:8-10.

MacGregor Ministries accuse the Watch Tower Society of deception, but in fact, it is McGregor who is being deceptive. Scholarly knowledge is easily available to everyone in our time through lexicons, grammars, commentaries and computer software, often free of charge at public library facilities. There is really no excuse for making such wild accusations without checking them out first.

For a further discussion of the meaning of *proskuneo*, please see [Worship or Obeisance?](#)

"Yet these men are abusive in matters of which they know nothing" -  
Jude 10, *Weymouth*.

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[15] "On (the) earth" in Latin is usually "in terra" (See Matthew 6:10, *Vulgate*).

## The *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* and the Deception of "MacGregor Ministries"

### PART 3

#### Colossians 1:16

MacGregor, doubtless copying out of other books and web pages, parrots the tired old allegation that the *New World Translation* has added words to the Bible. They say:

We will consider one example here from Colossians 1:16, 17. Notice the addition of the word "other" four times to alter the meaning of the text:

Now, go back and read the text without the addition of the word "other", which has no business being inserted in the first place.

A full discussion of this allegation is found at [Does the New World Translation Add Words to Colossians 1:17, 18?](#). However, let us just summarize the evidence:

1. All Bible translations add words in English to complete the sense.
2. In Koine Greek, it is often left to the reader's intelligence to understand when "other" is implied.

3. The adjective *pas*, all, in particular, frequently has the meaning 'all other' or 'every other' in the New Testament.
4. Many Biblical passages would be contradictory or unintelligible if we did not understand *pas* to mean 'all other'.
5. The rendering 'all other' does not in any case contradict the Trinity doctrine, in as much as Trinitarians and Jehovah's Witnesses alike agree that God did not create himself, but rather created all *other* things.

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givenness of our sins.<sup>s</sup> **15** He is the image<sup>t</sup> of the invisible<sup>u</sup> God, the first-born<sup>v</sup> of all creation; **16** because by means of him<sup>w</sup> all [other]<sup>\*</sup> things were created in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities.<sup>x</sup> All [other] things have been created through him<sup>y</sup> and for him. **17** Also, he is before all [other] things<sup>z</sup> and by means of him all [other] things were made to exist,<sup>a</sup> **18** and he is the head of the body, the congregation.<sup>b</sup> He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,<sup>c</sup> that he might become the one who is first<sup>d</sup> in all things; **19** because [God]<sup>\*</sup> saw good for all fullness<sup>e</sup> to dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile<sup>f</sup> again to himself all [other] things<sup>g</sup> by making peace<sup>h</sup> through the blood<sup>i</sup> [he shed] on the torture stake,<sup>\*j</sup> no matter whether they are<sup>#</sup> the things

**Col 1:8\*** Lit., "in spirit." **9\*** Lit., "petitioning." **10\*** "Of Jehovah," J<sup>7</sup>.<sup>\*</sup>; κAB(Gr.), *του Κυριου*; Vg, "of God." See App 1D. **16\*** "All [other]," as in Lu 11:41, 42. **19\*** Lit., "he."

sometimes the word 'other' must be added after the word 'all' in order to make sense of a text.)

You can also see the untruth of MacGregor's assertions by checking Colossians 1:16, 17 out for yourself at the Watch Tower Society's online *New World Translation*: <http://watchtower.org/e/bible/>.

MacGregor has another criticism of Colossians 1:16, 17:

At least they put it in brackets here, but when it got to the separate publication of the *New World Translation*, the brackets disappeared!<sup>[16]</sup>

Is this true? No it is not. The brackets are there in every edition of the English-language *New World Translation*, including the 1984 *Reference Bible* edition, the 1986 pocket-sized edition and the Watchtower Library CD-ROM.<sup>[17]</sup> See whether or not MacGregor's statement is a lie by examining this extract of the latest edition of the NWT (1984) on the left.

(By the way, check out the footnote. It explains why other has been added by a comparison with Luke 11:41, 42. If you look this up, you will see that

## John 1:1

Critics of Jehovah's Witnesses often accuse them of changing their teachings. Yet it is the critics themselves who have changed their teachings with regard to John 1:1. Let's take a look at their comments and compare them with later scholarship. MacGregor states:

The Watchtower "translators" have reduced Jesus to the status of "a god" in their mistranslation of John 1:1, and made a big deal out of the "Ho" (indefinite article) (sic) missing from in front of "theos" when referring to Christ

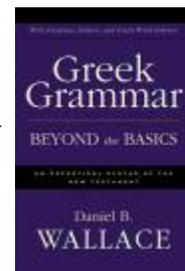
θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος

First, we should point out that 'ho' is not the "indefinite article" as MacGregor calls it here. In fact, Greek does not have an indefinite article.<sup>[18]</sup> Perhaps this was just a slip. Having cited the opinion of Bishop Westcott, they continue:

Simply put, since the definite article "ho" was used once earlier in the phrase, in Greek grammar it is understood but not stated again later in the phrase. Dr. Westcott concludes, with his knowledge of Greek, that the Word (Jesus Christ) is understood to be "Ho Theos", even in John 1:1.

This opinion was quite common among critics of the New World Translation just a few short years ago. However, since then they have changed their tune considerably. Note what Daniel Wallace - certainly no friend of the NWT<sup>[19]</sup> - had to say about the idea that the anarthrous *theos* in John 1:1 is definite:

Grammarians and exegetes since Colwell have taken θεός as definite in **John 1:1c**. However, their basis has usually been a misunderstanding of Colwell's rule. ... If we check the rule to see if it applies here, we would say that the previous mention of θεός (in 1:1b) is articular. Therefore, if the same person being referred to there is called θεός in 1:1c, then in both places it is definite. Although certainly possible grammatically (though not nearly as likely as qualitative), the evidence is not very compelling. The vast



majority of definite anarthrous pre-verbal predicate nominatives are monadic, in genitive constructions, or are proper names, none of which is true here, diminishing the likelihood of a definite θεός in John 1:1c.

Further, calling θεός in 1:1c definite is the same as saying that if it had followed the verb it would have had the article. Thus it would be a convertible proposition with λόγος (i.e., "the Word" = "God" and "God" = "the Word"). The problem of this argument is that the θεός in 1:1b is the Father. Thus to say that the θεός in 1:1c is the same person is to say that "the Word was the Father." This, as the older grammarians and exegetes pointed out, is embryonic Sabellianism<sup>[20]</sup> or modalism.<sup>[21]</sup>

So, McGregor Ministries' claim that "the Word (Jesus Christ) is understood to be "Ho Theos" has been jettisoned by modern-day grammarians of the Greek language. In fact, they are becoming more and more convinced that *theos* in John 1:1 c is *qualitative*, rather than definite. Interestingly, 30 years ago, *The Watchtower* contained the following statement:

Certain scholars have pointed out that anarthrous predicate nouns that precede the verb in Greek may have a qualitative significance.<sup>[22]</sup>

There is certainly a lot more that can be said about the translation of John 1:1, but the above should be sufficient to demonstrate that this criticism is unfounded.

### 1 Peter 3:15 and the *Interlinear* Footnote

In MacGregor's comments on 1 Peter 3:15, we find statements that are absurd even by their standards. For instance:

Sometimes we have to look beyond the surface reading to the footnotes to see the depth of deception in the KIT, but the truth is there for the finding.

So, according to MacGregor, the main text reading of 1 Peter 3:15 is deceptive, and the truth is in the footnote. It is difficult to believe that MacGregor has thought much about this statement. Both the interlinear text and the English column on the right-hand side say that we should "sanctify the Christ as Lord", the same reading found in the Revised Standard Version, the New International Version and just about every other modern version<sup>[23]</sup>. It is difficult to see how the KIT is "deceptive" in this verse when it reads the same as all other modern versions!

Greek	κύριον δε τον Χριστόν αγιάσατε εν ταις καρδιαις υμων
-------	--

NWT Interlinear Reading	Lord but the Christ sanctify-you in the hearts of-you
NWT	But sanctify the Christ as Lord in your hearts.
RSV	but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord
NIV	But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.

MacGregor goes on to remark excitedly:

Ahah! a "\*" after the word "Lord"<sup>[24]</sup>. What could they be concealing in the footnote? Let's see:

"Concealing in the footnote"? Another outlandish assertion. Footnotes in the Bible are not used to *conceal* information but rather to *add* extra information that is not in the main text. That is exactly what happens here.

There then follows a facsimile of the footnote found on page 1032 of the 1969 edition of the *Kingdom Interlinear* that reads:

Sanctify Jehovah God, J<sup>7, 8, 12-14, 16, 17</sup>

The letter J followed by those numbers refers to various translations of Peter's letter into Hebrew between 1599 and 1877. Thus, the *Kingdom Interlinear* recognizes that some later translators have seen a reference to Jehovah in this verse.

Now, here MacGregor gets very excited indeed:

Oh my! The Watchtower translators couldn't very well have their followers sanctifying Christ as Jehovah could they? Nor could they entertain the idea that Christ could be in their individual hearts as Jehovah God. Therefore they mistranslated, breaking all their own rules, to hide this important truth.

There is a serious problem with MacGregor's suppositions here. The footnote does not say "Sanctify Christ as Jehovah". It says "Sanctify Jehovah God". In the Hebrew translations that refer to Jehovah, Christ is not mentioned. In any case, Hebrew translations made more than a thousand years after the Bible was completed are never decisive evidence, merely interesting information for comparison.

It would be interesting to know from MacGregor: They say the Watchtower translators broke their own rules. What rules did they break? And how are they hiding an important truth when their rendering is the same as that of all the other Bible translations?

## Summary

The MacGregor Ministries web page on the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* is a case study in deceit, prejudice, ignorance and slipshod "scholarship".

- It ignores the evidence of well-known and respected lexicons, preferring to accuse Jehovah's Witnesses of making up definitions for words.
- It fails to recognize that the vast majority of the renderings of the *New World Translation* are by no means unique to Jehovah's Witnesses, but are found in numerous other translations made by scholars of impeccable qualifications.
- It misquotes Watch Tower literature to back up its claims.
- It gives evidence of fundamental misunderstandings of quite elementary points of Greek and English grammar.
- Instead of concentrating on scholarly debate and constructive criticism, it ridicules and slanders its opponent.
- It is hopelessly out of date with regard to certain aspects of the understanding of Greek grammar.

It would be nice to be able to say that MacGregor Ministries is an exception to the rule and that most websites critical of the NWT are more scholarly and professional. Sadly, that is not true. The MacGregor Ministries site, appalling though it is, is no worse than many other anti-Witness sites.

"Yet these men are abusive in matters of which they know nothing" -  
Jude 10, *Weymouth*.

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[16] The writer of the MacGregor Ministries' webpage apparently believed that the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* was published earlier than the standard *New World Translation*. Earlier on the page, he/she states, incorrectly, that the "New World Translation (NWT) is based on the KIT". Such sloppy research is evident throughout the whole page.

[17] Certain newer editions of the *New World Translation* in languages other than English do not use brackets to mark added words, a practice which is in any case considered unnecessary in modern translation theory. Very few modern English Bible versions systematically mark words added to complete the sense.

[18] Some grammars use the term 'definite article', but many refer to it simply as 'the article'.

[19] I hope to research references to the *New World Translation* in Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* and publish the results of the research on this site in the future.

[20] Sabellianism is the teaching that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are not three separate persons, but rather three successive modes of existence of God. It is rejected both by Jehovah's Witnesses and by evangelical Christian groups.

[21] *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel Wallace, Grand Rapids, 1996.

[22] *The Watchtower*, 15 November 1975, page 703.

[23] The *King James Version* has the expression "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" following the *Textus Receptus*. But that reading does not say that Christ is God either.

[24] Actually, it is not an asterisk but a letter 'b'.

## Worship or Obeisance?

CARM, a website critical of the *New World Translation*, makes the following observation:

"The word "proskuneo"<sup>[1]</sup> occurs 55 times in the Watchtower Kingdome [sic] Interlinear. Of those 55, 15 are in reference to Jesus with 40 used of others. 27% of the usage is of Jesus and not a single reference is translated as 'worship' even though in reference to the devil, demons, idols, etc., they do translate it as worship. If this doesn't demonstrate their bias, then what does?"<sup>[2]</sup>

The statistics mentioned on the above website are not entirely correct.

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Actually, the Greek word 'προσκυνέω<sup>[3]</sup>, *proskuneo*' occurs 60 times in Westcott & Hort Edition of the "New Testament", on which the *Kingdom Interlinear Translation* is based.<sup>[4]</sup> Sometimes, the *New World*

*Translation* uses the verb 'worship', other times, the expression 'do obeisance'. So let us discuss whether the above website's criticism of the *New World Translation* is valid. To do this, we need to examine (a) the range of meaning of the Greek word *proskuneo*, (b) criteria for determining which of the possible renderings should be used in any given situation, (c) whether the *New World Translation* has adhered strictly to these criteria.

### Range of Meaning of προσκυνέω, *proskuneo*

To establish what *proskuneo* means, we shall examine both lexical definitions and the use of the word in the Bible, both the Greek Septuagint and the New Testament.<sup>[5]</sup>

The United Bible Societies (UBS) Lexicon gives the following definitions for *proskuneo*:

worship; fall down and worship, kneel, bow low, fall at another's feet

The Friberg Lexicon states:

(1) from a basic sense *bow down to kiss* someone's feet, garment hem, or the ground in front of him; (2) in the NT of worship or veneration of a divine or supposedly divine object, expressed concretely with falling face down in front of someone *worship, venerate, do obeisance to*

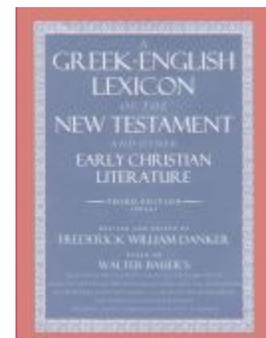
Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon says:

Plut.:- *to make obeisance to the gods, fall down and worship, to worship, adore, ...*

2. of the Oriental fashion of *making the salam or prostrating oneself before kings and superiors,*

The renowned *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, by Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich, 3rd edition, (BDAG) gives the following definition:

Freq. used to designate the custom of prostrating oneself before persons and kissing their feet or the hem of their garment, the ground, etc.; the Persians did this in the presence of their deified king, and the Greeks before a divinity or someth. holy.) to express in attitude or gesture one's complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure, (fall down and) worship, do obeisance to, prostrate oneself



before, do reverence to, welcome respectfully.

It adds that such respect is paid:

to human beings, but by this act they are to be recognized as belonging to a superhuman realm ... —Jesus, who is rendered homage as Messianic king and helper.<sup>[6]</sup>

An examination of above dictionary references indicates two basic possible meanings for *proskuneo*:

1. **Worship.** There can be no doubt that *proskuneo* is the word most frequently translated *worship* in the New Testament.
2. **Obeisance, homage, bowing down to a superior, for instance, a king.**

### Defining the English Terms

To prevent any possible confusion, let us now examine the meaning of the English terms *worship*, *obeisance*, *homage*, according to the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary*, third edition.

**Worship (verb):**

1. To honour or revere as a supernatural being or power or as a holy thing; to adore with appropriate acts, rites, or ceremonies. ...
2. To honour; to regard or treat with honour or respect; to salute, bow down to.

**Obeisance:** a respectful salutation; a bow or curtsy

**Homage:** acknowledgement of superiority; dutiful respect or honour shown

Although the verb 'to worship' in the sense of 'honour, regard, respect' has been widely used in the past, this usage is basically obsolete in modern English.<sup>[7]</sup> Hence, the only way the term 'worship' is currently used in English is that cited under definition

number 1 above, namely "to honour or revere as a supernatural being or power ... to adore with appropriate acts."<sup>[8]</sup>



### Use of *Proskuneo* in the New Testament

The article referred to above identifies a number of different persons to whom the verb προσκυνέω, *proskuneo* is applied:

Jesus	15 times
God	19 times
Demons	1 time
Dragon, beast, image	9 times
Devil	2 times
Generic	6 times
Idols	1 time
Peter	1 time
Angel	1 time

CARM's supposed "generic" category reveals a methodological error, bringing together a number of different items. In John 12:20, Acts 8:27, Acts 24:11, Revelation 11:1 and possibly Revelation 3:9, the verb is used in the sense of *worship*, with the object 'God' implied, e.g. "he came to Jerusalem to worship [sc. God]". However, CARM has also 'smuggled' another, quite significant, verse into this category: Matthew 18:26. We shall discuss this verse in greater detail shortly.

“ Although *proskuneo* can mean to worship, its basic meaning is unquestionably 'to bow down' ”

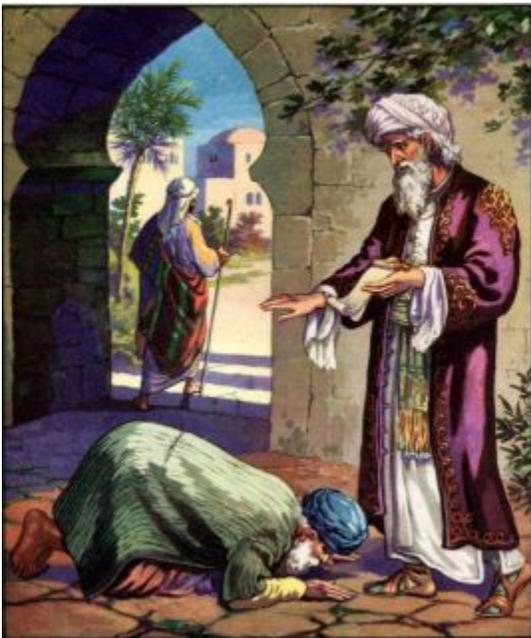
The NT usage of the verb *proskuneo* demonstrates the range of meaning given in the BDAG and other lexicons. There are cases where the verb clearly means 'to worship', but there are also cases where it can not mean anything other than 'to bow down' to.

In the Western world of the 21st century, we are not accustomed to bowing down to people. We might stand up when a judge enters the room, or nod our heads as a sign of respect, but that is usually as far as it goes. But we should not impose our understanding and culture on our

reading of the New Testament, which was written in the 1st century C.E. and reflects the culture and customs of the time.

One verse that demonstrates this quite clearly is Matthew 18:26. This is Jesus' parable of the unforgiving slave. When his master tells him that he intends to sell him, his family and possessions, we read the slave's reaction:

Greek	πεσων ουν ο δουλος προσεκυνει [prosekunei, from proskuneo] αυτω, λεγων κυριε, μακροθυμησον επ' εμοι και παντα σοι αποδωσω
KJV <sup>[9]</sup>	The servant therefore fell down and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me and I will pay the all.
NIV	The servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.'
NWT	Therefore the slave fell down and began to do obeisance to him, saying, 'Be patient with me and I will pay back everything to you.'



Is this verse telling us that the slave *worshipped* his master, in the sense of 'honouring or revering as a supernatural being'? No. It is true that the *King James Version* tells us that the slave worshipped his master, but that is because when the KJV was produced, the word 'worship' still included the simple meaning of bowing down. Thus, the modern-language *New International Version* correctly says that the slave "fell on his knees" before his master.<sup>[10]</sup>

This text, then, confirms the comments of numerous lexicons cited above, that *proskuneo* can mean, simply to bow

down.

This usage of *proskuneo* is also found in the Greek *Septuagint*. For example, at Genesis 23:7, we read about an incident in the life of Abraham:

Greek	αναστας δε Αβρααμ προσεκυνησεν [prosekunesen, from proskuneo]
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	τω λαω της γης, τοις υιοις Χετ
KJV	And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, even to the children of Heth
NIV	Then Abraham rose and bowed down before the people of the land, the Hittites.
NWT	Thereupon Abraham got up and bowed down to the natives, to the sons of Heth,

Similarly, we read in 1 Kings 1:23 about Nathan's approach to King David:

Greek	και εισηλθεν κατα προσωπον του βασιλεωσ και προσεκυνησεν [prosekunesen, from proskuneo] το βασιλει κατα προσωπον αυτου επι την γην
KJV	And when he was come in before the king, he bowed himself before the king with his face to the ground
NIV	So he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground.
NWT	After that he came in before the king and prostrated himself to the king with his face to the earth.

Some other instances where the Septuagint uses *proskuneo* to refer to bowing down as a mark of respect are:

- Genesis 33:3: Jacob bowed to his brother Esau
- Exodus 18:7: Moses bowed to his father-in-law
- Ruth 2:10: Ruth bowed to Boaz
- 1 Samuel 20:41: David bowed to Jonathan
- 1 Samuel 24:8: David bowed to King Saul
- 1 Samuel 25:3: Abigail bowed to David
- Daniel 2:46: Nebuchadnezzar bowed to Daniel

These, and many other, occurrences of the verb *proskuneo* in the Septuagint help us to understand two points:

1. In a variety of cultures in Bible times it was customary to bow down before someone as a gesture of respect, with absolutely no religious meaning at all.

2. The verb *proskuneo* is frequently used to describe such actions.

### Selecting the Correct Rendering

If translating the word *proskuneo* implies separating two shades of meaning, then on what basis can the translation decision be made? In other words, how can the translator decide whether to render the word "worship" or "do obeisance, bow before, pay homage"?

First, we must acknowledge that rendering *proskuneo* as 'did obeisance' or 'bowed before' is *never wrong* when describing a physical action. If such an action is prompted by reverence for God or a divinity, then the rendering 'worship' is appropriate. But even in that case, the rendering 'bowed before' is not inappropriate. The difference between simple bowing down and worship is a matter of the heart and mind of the one performing the action.

Worship is not difficult to distinguish from respect, obeisance or homage. The basic distinction is this: the person performing an act of worship views it as an acknowledgement of *divinity*. He considers that he is worshipping *God* or possibly one or more of *many gods*.

**In cases when the object of the verb *proskuneo* is God:** the rendering 'worship' is obviously appropriate, and probably no-one disputes it. True, certain verses might be translated "bow before God", even as Abraham's servant is said to have 'bowed down before Jehovah' (Genesis 24:26). Even if that is so, the meaning is certainly that of worship, as there could be no conceivable reason for bowing down before God, except to worship him.

**In cases where the verb's object is an idol, an image, or a false god, such as the devil, the demons, the wild beast of Revelation:** again the rendering 'worship' is appropriate, because the one performing the action is attributing (wrongly) to the thing worshipped the qualities of God. Here, too, a rendering like 'bow down' or 'do obeisance' might be used. But all of the above are *false gods*. They are false gods because people *worship* them. That is what makes them gods. The meaning of respect or honour here is improbable, since false gods are unlikely to be respected by anyone but their worshippers.

**In cases where the verb's object is a human or an angel,** either translation might conceivably be possible, but that would depend on what we are able to establish about the motives of the one performing the act of obeisance. In Genesis 23:7, *LXX*, the gesture seems to have indicated little more than politeness. In 1 Kings 1:23, we have the action of a loyal subject to his king, a gesture of submission and respect, but certainly not worship. Likewise, in Matthew 18:26, quoted above, it would simply be wrong to translate the word as 'worship'. The slave was not attributing any divine qualities to his master; he was simply throwing himself on his mercy.

On the other hand, there are cases where people *do* worship other humans. Emperor worship was rife in the Roman world. Did Cornelius intend to worship Peter? (Acts 10:25). In view of the context, that is unlikely, as Cornelius is said to be a God-fearing man. The *New World Translation* says that he 'did him obeisance'. The *New International Version* and the *Good News Translation* have similar renderings.

### The Fifteen Cases Involving Jesus Christ

The above principles provide us with more than enough guidance in order to decide how to translate the 15 occurrences of *proskuneo* with regard to Jesus Christ.

Three instances of the verb *proskuneo* involving Christ have to do with his birth. It is said that the three magi came to visit Jesus in order to 'do him obeisance' and that Herod, too, wished to 'do him obeisance'. (Matthew 2:2, 8, 11). Did the astrologers believe that Jesus was the Son of God? Did Herod? All they knew was that Jesus was called "King of the Jews". (Matthew 2:2). We have already established that it was customary to do obeisance to kings. Nothing in these accounts indicates that the translation 'worship' would be appropriate. They did not refer to the child even as the 'Son of God', not to mention God himself!

Numerous people approached Jesus and bowed down before him during his earthly ministry. Matthew 8:2 recounts how a beggar did obeisance to Jesus and asked to be healed. This man "entreated him on bended knee" (Mark 1:40). Nothing indicates that the man believed Jesus to be God. He was simply begging Jesus for a favour, just as the slave in Jesus' parable did obeisance to his master and begged for a favour.

Similarly, Matthew 9:18 tells us that Jairus 'did obeisance' to Jesus. Again, a parallel account gives a synonym: he 'fell at his feet' (Luke 18:41). These are the actions of a man requesting a great favour. Nothing points to an act of worship in this passage. The Phoenician woman mentioned in Matthew 15:25 also belongs here; she was begging Jesus to cure her demonized daughter. So, too, the mother of the sons of Zebedee, who asked a favour (Matthew 20:20), and a man from whom Jesus expelled demons (Mark 5:6)

Mark 15:19 tells us that the Roman soldiers 'did obeisance' to Christ. It is scarcely possible that anyone would contend that this was an act of worship! As far as the Romans were concerned, Jesus was being executed for claiming to be "King of the Jews". As we have already established, the correct way to behave in the presence of a king was to bow down. The soldiers were mocking Jesus' claim to be a king by cynically bowing down to him.<sup>[11]</sup>

We have seen, then, that in the above cases, there is absolutely no reason to conclude that the persons involved - most of them not believers - were actually worshipping Christ. They simply fell at his feet, in harmony with the prevailing custom of the day. What about cases where Christ's disciples 'did obeisance' to him, before and after his resurrection. Do these prove that Christ was worshipped?

Matthew 14:33 informs us that the disciples 'did obeisance' to Christ after he had silenced a great storm. John 9:38 tells us that a blind man who had been healed by Christ put faith in him and 'did obeisance' to him. Matthew 28:9 tells us that women who saw the resurrected Jesus 'did obeisance' to him, and Luke 24:52 tells us that other disciples did so too.

Is the *New World Translation* correct in rendering these verses as 'did obeisance' rather than 'worshipped'? Remember that 'do obeisance' is a broader term than 'worship'. It describes a specific act, which, in certain circumstances *could* imply worship, but does not always. If we can demonstrate that the disciples believed Jesus to be God, then we are justified in using the word 'worship'. Otherwise, we are better off sticking with 'did obeisance' or something similar. Since a physical act of bowing down is being described, the rendering 'did obeisance' is *definitely correct*, regardless of whether the disciples believed that Jesus was God or not, whereas the term 'worshipped' would only be correct if the disciples did believe such a thing. So the *New World Translation* can not be faulted for choosing the rendering that is definitely correct in these verses.<sup>[12]</sup>

Did the disciples believe that Jesus was God? That is a topic for another discussion, but there is one very interesting point raised by Professor Jason Beduhn. It concerns Matthew 28:17:

Greek	και ιδοντες αυτον προσεκυνησαν αυτω, οι δε εδιστασαν
KJV	when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted.
NIV	When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.
NWT	and when they saw him they did obeisance, but some doubted.

Can a person *worship* and *doubt* at the same time? As we have established above, the narrower rendering 'worship' can be justified only if we can prove that the disciples believed Jesus to be God. This verse indicates that some of them not only doubted that he is God, but they even doubted that it was

Jesus. In these circumstances, the rendering 'worshipped' is very hard to justify.

This leaves us with Hebrews 1:6, which in the *New World Translation* reads: "Let all God's angels do obeisance to him [that is, Christ]." The footnote very honestly admits that the phrase could be rendered by the alternate reading "worship him". Since Christ, as the Son of God, occupies a position much higher than that of the angels, it is only right that they should do him obeisance. But, again, we can not read more into Hebrews 1:6 than it is actually saying. If you believe Christ is God, then, clearly you will feel that the *proskuneo* here refers to worship. But if you are trying to use the *proskuneo* here to prove that Jesus is God, then your argument would be circular. It would be like saying that the verb must mean 'worship' because Jesus is God, and that he must be God because he is worshipped! You would be assuming the very thing you're trying to prove!

“The apostles could not have 'worshipped' and 'doubted' at the same time!”

No wonder, then, that Professor Beduhn comments: "There are passages where many translators have *interpreted* the gesture referred to by the Greek term *proskuneo* as implying 'worship'. They have then substituted that interpretation in the place of a translation."<sup>[13]</sup>

### Other Translations

Other translations, too, have recognized that a rendering like 'do obeisance' or 'bow before' is appropriate.

	<i>New English Bible</i> <sup>[14]</sup>	<i>Jerusalem Bible</i> <sup>[15]</sup>	<i>New American Bible</i> <sup>[16]</sup>
<i>Matthew 2:2</i>	<i>pay him homage</i>	<i>do him homage</i>	<i>do him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 2:8</i>	<i>pay him homage</i>	<i>do him homage</i>	<i>do him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 2:11</i>	<i>bowed to the ground in homage to him</i>	<i>did him homage</i>	<i>prostrated themselves</i>
<i>Matthew 8:2</i>	<i>bowed low</i>	<i>bowed low in front of him</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 9:18</i>	<i>bowed low before him</i>	<i>bowed low in front of him</i>	<i>knelt down before him</i>

<i>Matthew 14:33</i>	<i>fell at his feet</i>	<i>bowed down before him</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 15:25</i>	<i>fell at his feet</i>	<i>was kneeling at his feet</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 20:20</i>	<i>bowed low</i>	<i>bowed low</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 28:9</i>	<i>falling prostrate before him</i>	<i>falling down before him</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>Matthew 28:17</i>	<i>fell prostrate before him</i>	<i>fell down before him</i>	<i>worshipped [NB: not 'worshipped him']</i>
<i>Mark 5:6</i>	<i>flung himself down before him</i>	<i>fell at his feet</i>	<i>prostrated himself</i>
<i>Mark 15:19</i>	<i>paid mock homage to him</i>	<i>do him homage</i>	<i>knelt before him in homage</i>
<i>Luke 24:52</i>	-	<i>worshipped him</i>	<i>did him homage</i>
<i>John 9:38</i>	<i>bowed before him</i>	<i>worshipped him</i>	<i>worshipped him</i>
<i>Hebrews 1:6</i>	<i>pay him homage</i>	<i>worship him</i>	<i>worship him</i>

Is it true, then, as the CARM website asserts:

"As you can see, the NWT is very bias [sic] in how it translates the word "proskuneo." Whenever it is in reference to Jesus, they absolutely will not let it be translated as worship. Why? Because they erringly deny that Jesus is God in flesh and their Bible reflects their bias. This is not how proper theology is done. ... The Watchtower Organization has changed the Bible to suit its needs"?

Let us summarize the evidence:

(1) **Lexicons.** All reliable lexicons list at least *two* meanings for *proskuneo*. One meaning is 'worship'; the other is 'bow low, prostrate oneself, do obeisance'

(2) **Bible usage.** It is clearly seen from a number of examples in the NT and the Septuagint that the verb is frequently used without any religious significance, simply as a gesture of respect, submission, and humility.

(3) **Other Bible translations.** It may be seen that other Bible translations, on occasion, agree with the NWT in *not* translating *proskuneo* as worship, when it refers to Jesus Christ.

So who is really biased - the *New World Translation Committee* or its critics?  
Let scholar Jason Beduhn answer:

"In our exploration of this issue, we can see how theological bias has been the determining context for the choices made by all of the translations except the NAB and NW. There are passages where many translators has interpreted the gesture referred to by the Greek term *proskuneo* as implying 'worship'. They have then substituted that interpretation in place of translation. ... The translators seem to feel the need to add to the New Testament support for the idea that Jesus was recognized to be God. But the presence of such an idea cannot be supported by selectively translating a word one way when it refers to Jesus and another way when it refers to someone else. ... When we observe how these same translators choose 'worship' when the gesture is made to Jesus by certain persons, and choose other English words to translate the very same Greek term when the gesture is directed to someone other than Jesus ... their inconsistency reveals their bias. <sup>[17]</sup>

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[1] 'Proskuneo' and 'proskuneo' are alternative transliterations of the Greek verb προσκυνέω.

[2] CARM website at [http://www.carm.org/jw/nwt\\_proskuneo.htm](http://www.carm.org/jw/nwt_proskuneo.htm)

[3] In this and other essays on this site, accent marks on Greek text have been deliberately omitted, as experience has shown that polytonic Greek fonts are seldom displayed correctly.

[4] The list produced by CARM is not entirely accurate. A search of the *Westcott & Hort* Greek Text of the New Testament using the e-sword program

yielded a total of 60 occurrences in 54 verses, six verses having the word twice (John 4:20, 22, 23, 24, Revelation 13:4; 19:10.)

[5] In this essay, we are using the term 'New Testament' for convenience. Jehovah's Witnesses feel it is more accurate and descriptive to refer to this portion of the Bible as the "Christian Greek Scriptures".

[6] These dictionary quotations are taken from reference works available through the Bibleworks 5 software.

[7] It has, however, left its mark on modern English in such terms as "Your Worship" (the correct form of address for a Justice of the Peace or a Mayor in England).

[8] We are not here discussing the metaphorical usage of the word in expressions such as "he worships (or, adores) his wife", which might in most cases be classed as hyperbole.

[9] Abbreviations: KJV, King James Version; NIV, New International Version; NWT, New World Translation.

[10] The use of *proskuneo* at Revelation 3:9 is debatable. It could either mean that the opposers would worship God in front of true worshippers (the object of the verb, 'God', being understood in Greek), or it could mean (as in the *NWT*) that they would 'do obeisance' to the true worshippers, bowing down in acknowledgement of the fact that Christians are servants of the true God.

[11] Of course, in the Roman world it was generally believed that emperors and kings were divine, so perhaps they were pretending to worship Jesus. But the point is irrelevant for our purposes.

[12] The rendering 'did obeisance' does not in any case contradict the doctrine that Jesus is God. We have seen in the Hebrew scriptures that servants of God did literally bow down to him on occasion. So Trinitarians should have no real quarrel with the rendering 'did obeisance'. However, this rendering deprives them of one of their principal arguments for the view that Christ is Almighty God.

[13] *Truth in Translation - Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament*, page 47.

[14] 1961 edition. The *New English Bible* was made by representatives of the Church of England, Church of Scotland, Methodist, Baptist and Congregationalist Churches, as well as the Presbyterian Church in England, Society of Friends, Church in Wales, Churches in Ireland, British and Foreign Bible Society, and National Bible Society of Scotland.

[15] The Jerusalem Bible is a Catholic Bible version published in 1966, under the supervision of Alexander Jones, Christ's College, Liverpool.

[16] The *New American Bible* was produced by team of approximately 50 Bible scholars, the majority of whom were Catholics.

[17] *Truth in Translation - Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament*, page 47.

## "The Fullness of the Divine Quality" in Colossians 2:9

The *New World Translation* is often criticised for its rendering of Colossians 2:9, shown below for comparison in a number of translations:

Greek	οτι εν αυτω κατοικει παν το πληρωμα της θεοτητος [ <i>theotetos</i> , from <i>theotes</i> ] σωματικως
NWT	because it is in him that all the fullness of the <b>divine quality</b> dwells bodily
KJV	For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the <b>Godhead</b> bodily.
NIV	For in Christ all the fulness of the <b>Deity</b> lives in bodily form
Vulgate	quia in ipso inhabitat omnis plenitudo <b>divinitatis</b> <sup>14</sup> [divinity] corporaliter
Weymouth	For it is in Christ that the fulness of <b>God's nature</b> dwells embodied, and in Him you are made complete
NET	For in him all the fullness of <b>deity</b> lives in bodily form

### Defining Terms

The New Testament was not written in English, of course, but in Koine Greek. Of decisive importance for us is the precise meaning of the original Greek word used in the Bible. Let's look at the dictionary definitions of the Greek word θεότης, *theotes*, used by Paul in Colossians 2:9:

Friberg Lexicon <sup>12</sup>	θεότης, ητος η as an abstract noun for θεός ( <i>god</i> ); <i>divinity, deity, Godhead, divine nature</i> (CO 2.9)
UBS Lexicon	θεότης, ητος f deity, godhead
Louw-Nida Lexicon	θεότης, ητος f; θειότης, ητος f; θειον, ου n: (derivatives of θεός 'God,' 12.1) the nature or state of being God - 'deity, divine nature, divine being.' θεότης: εν αυτω κατοικει παν το πληρωμα της θεοτητος σωματικως 'in him dwells all the

	fullness of divine nature in bodily form' Col 2.9
Liddell and Scott	<b>θεότης, η</b> (θεός) <i>divinity, divine nature</i> , Luc.
Thayer's	<b>θεότης, ητος, η</b> (deitas <sup>91</sup> , Tertullian, Augustine (de 104: Dei 7, 1)), <i>deity</i> i. e. the state of being God, <i>Godhead</i> : Col. 2:9. (Lucian, Icar. 9; Plutarch, de defect. orac. 10, p. 415 c.)
BDAG	<b>θεότης, ητος, η</b>  the state of being god, <i>divine character/nature, deity, divinity</i> , used as abstract noun for θεός (Orig., C. Cels. 7, 25, 9): το πληρωμα της θ. <i>the fullness of deity</i> Col 2:9 (s. Nash s.v. θειότης).

Thus, lexicons give expressions such as: divinity, deity, godhead, divine nature, divine being. But what do *these* expressions mean? An examination of some English dictionaries reveals that the meanings of these words is considerably broader than some Trinitarians would like them to be.

To demonstrate this, let's look at the English terms that various English Bibles use to translate the Greek word *θεότης*, *theotes* in this verse:

Term	Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (2 volume)	Merriam Webster ( <a href="http://www.m-w.com">www.m-w.com</a> )
Godhead	1. The <b>quality</b> of being God or <b>a god</b> ; <b>divine</b> nature or essence; deity.  2. a. <i>The Godhead</i> , = GOD.	1 : <b>divine nature</b> or essence : <b>DIVINITY</b> 2 <i>capitalized</i> a : <b>GOD</b> 1 b : the nature of God especially as existing in three persons -- used with <i>the</i>
Deity	1. The estate or rank of <b>a god</b> ; godhood; godship; esp. with poss. pron. b. the <b>divine nature</b> of God; Godhood; the Godhead.  2. concr. A divinity, a divine being, <b>a god</b> .  3. (with capital.) A supreme being as creator of the universe; <i>the Deity</i> , the Supreme Being, God.	1 a : the rank or essential <b>nature</b> of <b>a god</b> : <b>DIVINITY</b> b <i>capitalized</i> : <b>GOD 1, SUPREME BEING</b> 2 : <b>a god</b> or goddess <the <i>deities</i> of ancient Greece> 3 : one exalted or revered as supremely good or powerful
Divinity	1. The <b>character</b> or <b>quality</b> of being divine; divineness; divine nature; Deity,	2 : the <b>quality</b> or <b>state</b> of being <b>divine</b> 3 <i>often capitalized</i> : <b>a divine</b> being: as a : <b>GOD</b> 1 b (1) : <b>GOD</b>

Godhead.	2 (2) : <u>GODDESS</u>
2. concr. A divine being; a god; a deity.	
3. Divine quality, virtue, or power.	

Straight away, two things should be apparent: Firstly, none of the above-mentioned words - Godhead, deity, divinity - *necessarily* mean that Christ is Almighty God. True, they could all be *interpreted* to mean that. But, then again, they can all be used to mean having the nature of a god rather than Almighty God. Secondly, all of these terms refer first and foremost to *character, quality, state, nature* and then, by extension, to identity.

### Is "Divine Quality" a satisfactory rendering of *theotes*?

To answer that question we need to consider, not only whether the English expression *divine quality* means the same as *theotes*, but also whether it is as specific as its Greek equivalent. This second point is important, because when critics object to the rendering 'divine quality', it is usually not because they deny that Christ is full of the divine quality. What they do object to is that, in their view, the rendering 'divine quality' understates the meaning of *theotes*, in other words fails to show that Jesus is completely God.<sup>[4]</sup> So is "divine quality" a correct translation for *theotes*?

A look at the above lexicons shows beyond any doubt that it is. BDAG uses the expression "divine character", which means basically the same as "divine quality". "Divinity" - a term used by Friberg, Liddell and Scott's Lexicon and BDAG, is defined by the Shorter Oxford as "the character or quality of being divine". This, too, shows the legitimacy of the rendering 'divine quality'. In fact, as shown above, all three terms frequently used to translate θεοτης have dictionary definitions that include the words 'divine' and 'quality' or one of its synonyms. Thus, although none of the above-cited lexicons use the precise expression "divine quality", critics are splitting hairs when they reject the reading as inaccurate.<sup>[5]</sup>

### Does Θεότης, *Theotes* Refer Specifically to the Qualities or Essence of Almighty God?

The word *theotes*, then, does not necessarily refer to Almighty God. Even the other expressions used by the above lexicons, *Deity* and *Godhead* do not necessarily refer to the Creator. The Shorter Oxford uses the expression "a god" in defining 'deity', 'godhead' and 'divinity'

In Greek, the suffix -της, -tes is frequently used to make an abstract noun out of an adjective or out of a concrete noun. Thus *kainos* (new) produces *kainotes* (newness), *adelphos* (brother) produces *adelphotes* (brotherhood)<sup>[6]</sup>. This, -tes can be seen to be similar in certain respects to English suffixes such as -ship, -ness, or -hood.

As can be seen from the above lexicons, *theotes* is derived from the word *theos*, which means 'God' or 'a god'. It therefore *could* mean what the Louw-Nida Lexicon says, "the nature or state of being God", because *theos* can mean God. But it could equally mean "the nature or state of being a god". Just as *theos* has that range of meaning, so must *theotes*. In this sense, the expression "fulness of divine nature," suggested by Louw-Nida is appropriate, because the English adjective *divine*, like the Greek noun *theos*, can pertain to God or to a god. Thus, the ambiguity of the original text is preserved.

Of course, critics do not generally accept that *theos* in the New Testament can be used of Christ without implying that he is Almighty God. They feel that the term refers either to the true God or to false Gods, nothing in between. Thus, they assert that the term *theotes* might well be translated *divinity* or *godship* in a pagan context, but that such an interpretation would be out of place in the monotheism of the New Testament.

What critics fail to realize is that *theos* is also used of others. God *has* caused others to exist whom he permits to be referred to as "gods". These include human judges<sup>[7]</sup> and the corresponding Hebrew term *elohim* is used of angels<sup>[8]</sup>. In the Bible, *theos* is unquestionably used on occasion to refer to God's representatives, including God's foremost representative, the Word.

It is this confusion that makes it so difficult for many critics to accept the *New World Translation* rendering of John 1:1c, a rendering which some mistakenly believe to promote polytheism or henotheism. And, of course, a failure to understand the semantic range of the word *theos* leads to a similar failure to understand that of *theotes*. Until you understand that *theos* can properly refer to God's representatives, you will never understand that *theotes* could legitimately be applied to their qualities.

### Differences between θεότης, *Theotes* and θειότης, *Theiotes*

Some critics argue that if Paul wanted to say Christ was full of the divine quality, he would have used the word *theiotes* rather than *theotes*.

The word *theiotes* is derived from *theios*, meaning divine. Thus Thayer's Lexicon comments that θεότης *deity* differs from θειότης *divinity*, as essence differs from quality or attribute".

However, θεότης, like most nouns ending in -της, is an abstract noun. Scholar Dan Wallace makes the following comment about abstract nouns:

Abstract nouns by their very nature focus on a quality. However, when such a noun is articular, that quality is "tightened up," as it were, defined more closely, distinguished from other notions.<sup>[9]</sup>

The function of nouns ending in *-tes*, then, is to show a quality, just as words ending in *-ship*, *-ness*, or *-hood* in English show quality, not identity. Both *theotes* and *theiotes* are abstract nouns and, as such, focus on qualities. *Theotes* focuses on the quality of that which is *theos*, and *theiotes* focuses on the quality of that which is *theios*. Since *theios*, divine, basically means pertaining to God or to a god, then it is unsurprising that lexicons give similar definitions for *theotes* and *theiotes*, Liddell and Scott's Lexicon, for instance, giving virtually identical definitions for both words.

The Greek word *theiotes* is used in Romans 1:20. The *New World Translation* renders this word as 'godship'. Although most lexicons prefer the rendering 'divinity' for *theiotes*, it should be noted that the word 'godship' is defined by *Merriam Webster Unabridged Online Dictionary* as "the rank, character or personality of a god", thus making it very close in meaning to the terms divinity and deity, as defined in the lexicons referred to above.

### Historical Use of θεότης and θειότης

The Bauer Danker Arndt and Gingrich Lexicon, referred to above, cites the work of Nash in its definition of *theotes*. This lexicon, in its entry under θειοτης also has the following reference: HNash, **θεότης - θειότης** Ro 1:20, Col 2:9: JBL 18, 1899, 1-34. It would therefore be instructive to look at some of Nash's conclusions from the article in *Journal of Biblical Literature* that was cited by this highly respected lexicon.

Among Nash's conclusions are the following:

1. Paul was not using the terms to distinguish between God's being, personality and nature on the one hand and his attributes on the other.
2. There was no reason why pagan Greeks should distinguish between *theotes* and *theiotes*.

3. In the usage of the early Greek Church, the distinction between the two terms was unknown.

H. S. Nash also explains why this misunderstanding arose:

The chief fault in the exponents of the distinction between the terms is that they have taken little or almost no account of the long history of the terms. They have made no attempt to correlate them with the history of thought. They have not asked whether the system of the author in question called for the distinction, but, taking the terms as the isolated expressions of an isolated theorem, have picked up an example wherever it came their way. The only excuse for the hasty study of the larger context of the stock illustrations is the fact that the traditional view, having ruled interpretations for six centuries, has naturally fallen into the habit of taking itself for granted.

Further extracts of Nash's work have been posted on the B-Greek discussion list and can be viewed here: <http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/test-archives/html4/1999-09/32904.html>

## The Context

It is also worth examining the context of Colossians 2:9 and the use of the word πληρωμα, *pleroma*, usually translated 'fulness'. This word is significant because Paul uses it just a few verses earlier in Colossians 1:19, which is presented from a number of translations below:

Greek	οτι εν αυτω ευδοκησεν παν το πληρωμα κατοικησαι, <i>oti en auto eudokesen pan to pleroma katoikesai</i>
KJV	For it pleased <i>the Father</i> <sup>[10]</sup> that in him [Christ] should all fulness dwell
NIV	<b>For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him [Christ]</b>
GNT	For it was by God's own decision that the Son has in himself the full nature of God. <sup>[11]</sup>
NWT	because [God] <sup>[12]</sup> saw good for all fullness to dwell in him [Christ]

Is the "fullness" referred to in these verses the same "fullness" mentioned in Colossians 2:9? Methodist commentator Adam Clarke believes so. Commenting on Colossians 1:19, he remarks:

The πληρωμα, or fullness, must refer here to the Divine nature dwelling in the man Christ Jesus.

Likewise, the Jamieson, Fawcett and Brown commentary on the same verse says:

**all fulness** – rather as *Greek*, "all *the* fullness," namely, *of God*, whatever divine excellence is in God the Father (Col 2:9; Eph 3:19; compare Joh 1:16; Joh 3:34)

Scholar A. T. Robertson says:

**All the fulness** (*pan to pleroma*). The same idea as in Col 2:9 *pan to pleromates theotetos* (all the fulness of the Godhead). "A recognized technical term in theology, denoting the totality of the Divine powers and attributes" (Lightfoot)<sup>[13]</sup>

However, Colossians 1:19 presents a major problem for Trinitarians. According to the above translations, Christ has this fullness because "it pleased the Father" (KJV) or "by God's own decision". Greg Stafford makes a very telling point here:

The Scriptures will not sustain the view that Almighty God's powers and attributes are something contingent upon the "will" or "decree" of another. Such is the case, however, with the fullness belonging to the Lord Jesus Christ. God "chose" (Goodspeed), "decided" (Beck), "willed" (Moffatt) to have all His attributes displayed in the person of His Son.

Stafford is right. If Christ were actually God, then he would have all the fullness of deity of his own right, not because of a decision taken by someone else. Of course, regardless of whether we understand Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 to be talking about the same thing, Colossians 1:19 presents great difficulties for Trinitarians. Whatever the *plerotes* mentioned in that verse is, how come Christ received it? And what was his position before receiving it? How does that affect his supposed equality with God?

Stafford continues:

However, it is actually uncommon in reading through different commentaries and articles that discuss issues connected with 1:19 and 2:9 to find a scholar who tries to disconnect what is said in the two passages. This is likely because they do not see the problem involved in the use of *eudokeo* [the verb translated 'to please']<sup>[14]</sup>

### Summary of Evidence

Thus, Mark McFall's statement that the "Watchtower Society can do no more than present a Latin translation of the Greek original for their defense and assert that they have "a solid basis" for their own translation" is certainly misleading. From our brief review of the evidence, we can draw the following conclusions:

- (1) *Theotes* is an abstract noun derived from *theos*. Just as *theos* has a range of meanings, so does *theotes*.
- (2) Standard Greek lexicons define the Greek word *theotes* using words such as divinity, divine nature, deity and Godhead.
- (3) The English words used in many translations also have a range of meaning that encompasses the qualities of Almighty God but also includes the qualities of 'a god'.
- (4) The *New World Translation* rendering "divine quality" is entirely consistent with the definitions of *theotes* given in the lexicons.
- (5) The context of Colossians 2:9 also indicates that Christ has the fullness of divine quality because God chose to give it to him.

Ironically, nothing in the *New World Translation's* rendering of Colossians 2:9 contradicts the belief that Christ is Almighty God. Whether you accept Jehovah's Witnesses' view of Christ or not, you can still believe that Christ is full of the "divine quality". So why all the fuss?

What Trinitarians are really objecting to is the fact that the *New World Translation* deprives them of one of their favourite proof texts, and such texts are few and far between. However, there is no point in trying to force onto a

text a meaning that is simply not there, or to artificially restrict the meaning of a particular word to fit one's own concept of God.

This is eisegesis, rather than exegesis - reading one's own ideas into the text, instead of letting the Bible speak, allowing it to be precise where it is precise and vague, where it is vague. And sometimes the words and expressions used are unclear - to us. Paul's readers already knew who Jesus Christ was before reading the letter to the Colossians. They would not have had to think twice about it. We, today, can have the same understanding of God's word by discarding the blinkers of creedal views of Christianity and letting the Bible speak for itself. This includes the following statements in Colossians:

- God [not just the Father] and Christ Jesus referred to as separate persons. (1:1)
- Jesus' Father is God. (1:3)
- Jesus is [not God but] the image of God (1:15)
- Jesus is the firstborn of all creation (1:15)
- Christ is seated at God's right hand (3:1)
- We should thank God through Christ (3:17)

It is quite obvious to anyone examining the question without Trinitarian bias that Paul conceived of God as one person (not three) and of Christ as another, separate person.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Scholar H. S. Nash, referred to later in this article, says of the Vulgate's use of *divinitas*: "The Vulgate gives *divinitas* as the equivalent of θεότης in Col 2:9; and from Tertullian down to Aquinas it is always so quoted. If that fact stood alone, it might not have much weight. It could then be fairly urged that the earlier text of the Vulgate was the work of translators, who, knowing Greek only in the rough, slurred over a fine distinction, like that between θειότης and θεότης, and, furthermore, when once the Vulgate had entrenched itself in liturgical use and popular reverence, it was next to an impossibility to change it. The fact, however, that the Greeks themselves did not know the tradition, knocks the bottom out of that argument."

<sup>[2]</sup> Friberg's *Analytical Lexicon of the New Testament* (2000 edition).

<sup>[3]</sup> Note, however, that the *Vulgate* uses *divinitas*, not *deitas*, to translate *theotes*.

<sup>[4]</sup> For this discussion, we have assumed that the genitive here in the expression *fullness of the Godhead / Deity / divinity* is a genitive of content. In other

words, it indicates the quantity or amount of *theotes* that is present in Christ (namely, all of it). While we are persuaded that this is the correct understanding, and our discussion has therefore focused on the meaning of *theotes*, it must be remembered that the genitive case in Greek has many different shades of meaning. Since Colossians 1:19 says that Christ has *plerotes* (fullness) by God's own decision, it might well be possible for someone to construct a case for a genitive of source, i.e. "the fullness that comes from the Deity."

[5] Mark McFall, in his article, "An analysis of The Kingdom Interlinear Translation of the Watchtower Society - "Theotes" in Col 2:9 and "Theiotes" in Rom 1:20" acknowledges that: "some scholars accept theotes as meaning divinity which could convey the rendering 'divine quality'".

[6] In defining *αδελφότης*, *adelphotes*, Thayer's Lexicon states that this is an example of 'the abstract for the concrete'.

[7] The human judges of Israel are called "gods" in Psalm 82:1, 6. Christ quoted this Psalm in John 10:24, 25, pointing out that even human judges were called "gods" (*theoi*), so it was not improper for him to call himself the "Son of God".

[8] Psalm 8:5 reads: "You have made him [man] only a little lower than the gods" (Bible in Basic English). Other translations use "the angels" (KJV, Vulgate, LXX), "God" (ASV, RSV) or another expression such as "the godlike ones" (NWT) or "the heavenly beings" (NIV). The Hebrew *elohim* could mean God or gods. Hebrews 2:7 confirms that the reference here is to angels. Therefore, the angels can be referred to as *elohim*, or gods, godlike ones.

[9] *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, page 226.

[10] The object of the verb "pleased" does not appear in the Greek. So it does not actually state *who* was pleased to give Christ all fullness. Albert Barnes comments on this verse: "The words "the Father" are not in the original, but they are not improperly supplied. Some word must be understood, and as the apostle in Col 1:12 referred to "the Father" as having a claim to the thanks of his people for what he had done, and as the great favor for which they ought to be thankful is that which he immediately specifies - the exaltation of Christ, it is not improper to suppose that this is the word to be understood here."

[11] Note, however, that the expression "full nature of God" does not appear in the original Greek and is a paraphrase.

[12] Parentheses as in original.

[13] These quotations are taken from the respective modules of the e-sword program.

[14] *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, pp. 158-60.

## Does the *New World Translation* Add Words to Colossians 1:16, 17?

Do not add anything or take anything away! (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18, 19) Anyone who undertakes to translate God's Word into another language must see this as a particularly sobering warning. So it is important to consider the common accusation made against the *New World Translation* that it has added words to Colossians 1:16-20.

Typical of such accusations is that made by the late Ray Stedman:

"If you look carefully at the Jehovah's Witnesses' little green translation of the Scriptures, you will notice that in order to substantiate their lie about Jesus Christ, **they've inserted the word "other" in these phrases.** "All other things were created by him. In him all other things were created." But **there is absolutely no warrant whatsoever in the Greek text for the insertion of the word "other."** This is a clear instance of the kind of deceitfulness to which these people will stoop in order to propagate their lies."<sup>[1]</sup> (Emphasis added)



Leaving aside the emotive language used by Stedman and his failure to allow even for the possibility that the NWT translators might be sincere in their efforts, the substance of this allegation must be investigated. Has the word 'other' been inserted arbitrarily, without foundation?

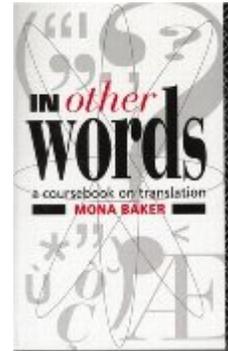
### Understanding How Translations are Made

Translation involves rendering the words and thoughts of a writer in one language (generally referred to as the Source Language) into another (called the Target Language). The process of translating anything involves much more than simply substituting a word in the source language for a corresponding word in the target language.

As one textbook used for training translators states:

"Elements of meaning which are represented by several orthographic words in one language, say English, may be represented by one orthographic word in another, and vice versa. ... *There is no one-to-one correspondence between orthographic words and elements of meaning within or across languages.*" (Italics added)<sup>[2]</sup>

Frequently, then translators are obliged to use more than one word in English to give a complete picture of what is being said in the Greek text of the Bible. This happens constantly. For instance, Colossians 1 in the original Greek has 551 words, whereas the *King James Version* has 656 words, the *New International Version* has 673, the *New World Translation* has 766 and the *Good News Bible (Today's English Version)* has 797. There is nothing unusual or sinister about this. Often, the extra words are needed to complete the sense in English.



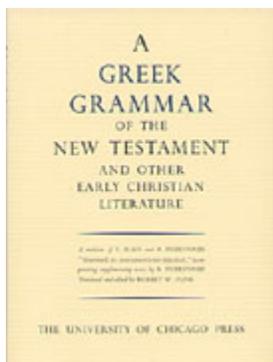
What we have to ask ourselves, then, is not whether there is a particular *word* in Colossians 1:16 that means 'other' but whether the *idea* of 'other' is found in the meaning of the complete *sentence*.

### Does *Koine* Greek Always Require the Use of a Word for "Other"?

The *koine* Greek of the New Testament has a number of words that may be translated as 'other'. These include among a number of others *ἄλλος* (*allos*), *ἕτερος* (*heteros*), *λοιπός* (*loipos*). Frequently, however, the concept of 'other' is not stated expressly, it is simply implied.

Instructive in this regard is the comment made by noted scholars Blass, Debrunner and Funk, in their *Grammar*:

"Further ellipses: (1) The omission of the notion 'other, whatever' (§ 306 (5)) is specifically Greek." <sup>[3]</sup>



In other words, Greek sometimes takes it for granted that the word 'other' is implied. This phenomenon is not unique to Greek; it is sometimes encountered in English, which may occasionally omit the word 'other' when there is little chance of misunderstanding. But an examination of the New Testament indicates that this type of structure is encountered with much greater frequency in *koine* Greek.

Consider, for example, the following phrases from the book of Acts. The original Greek is followed by the *King James Version* rendering in red and the *New International Version* in blue.

Acts 5:29	<p>αποκριθεις δε Πετρος και οι αποστολοι ειπον [apokritheis de Petros kai oi apostoloi eipon]</p> <p>Then Peter and the <i>other</i> apostles answered and said</p> <p>Peter and the <i>other</i> apostles replied</p>
Acts 4:6	<p>Καιαφαν και Ιωαννην και Αλεξανδρον και οσοι ησαν εκ γενους αρχιερατικου [Kaiaphan kai Ioannen kai Alexandros kai hosoi esan ek genous archieratiku]</p> <p>Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest,</p> <p>Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the <i>other</i> men of the high priest's family</p>
Acts 16:25	<p>Κατα δε το μεσονυκτιον Παυλος και Σιλας προσευχομενοι υμνου τον Θεον· επηκρωντο δε αυτων οι δεσμιοι. [Kata de to mesonyktion Paulos kai Silas proseuchomenoi hymnoun ton Theon; epekroonto de auton oi desmioi]</p> <p>And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.</p> <p>About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the <i>other</i> prisoners were listening to them.</p>

It is evident that in the above cases *other* is not expressed in Greek - but it is implied. The Greek expression translated literally as "Peter and the apostles" does not imply that Peter was not an apostle. Likewise, Caiaphas *was* the High Priest, and Paul and Silas *were* prisoners. The *New International Version* has correctly supplied the word 'other', which is implicit in the above sentences, although it is not possible to point to a particular word in the above sentences that is translated *other*. The *King James Version* has done likewise in Acts 5:29, but not in the other two instances, leaving it to the intelligence of the reader to understand this.

“ The omission of the notion 'other' is specifically Greek ”

*Greek Grammar*, Blass, Debrunner Funk

Use of *pas* to mean 'all other'

The omission of words that express the notion 'other' is particularly common with the Greek word *pas* (all). This may be seen by comparing verses in the *New International Version* where a form of the Greek word *pas* is translated by 'all other(s)' or some similar phrase. In the following table, none of the verses cited use any of the Greek words traditionally translated 'other'. The word is merely implied by the context.

Matt. 26:35	And all the <b>other</b> disciples said the same.
Mark 12:43	this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the <b>others</b> .
Luke 3:19	And all the <b>other</b> disciples said the same.
Luke 11:42	you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all <b>other</b> kinds of garden herbs
Luke 13:2	Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the <b>other</b> Galileans because they suffered this way?
Luke 13:4	do you think they were more guilty than all the <b>others</b> living in Jerusalem?
Acts 16:32	Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the <b>others</b> in his house.
1 Cor. 6:18	All <b>other</b> sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.
2 Cor. 9:13	your generosity in sharing with them and with everyone else.
1 Thess. 3:12	May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else
1 Thess. 5:15	always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else

In all of the above occurrences, the *New International Version* has used words such as 'other' or 'else' to complete the sense in English.<sup>[4]</sup> This does not mean that they are adding to God's word, they are simply making explicit or clear what was already there in the Greek text. Thus, it is by no means wrong to translate *pas* as 'all other,' *where that is what is implied by the context*.

### A Greek Lesson from the Apostle Paul

The writings of the Apostle Paul himself, who wrote the letter to the Colossians, teach us that *pas* can have the meaning of 'all other things'. Consider what he writes in 1 Corinthians 15:28:

Greek	<p><b>παντα</b> γαρ υπεταξεν υπο τους ποδας αυτου οταν δε ειπη οτι <b>παντα</b> υποτετακται δηλον οτι εκτος του υποταξαντος αυτω τα <b>παντα</b></p> <p>[<b>panta</b> gar hypetaxen hypo tous podas autou. otan de eipe hoti <b>panta</b> hypotetaktai delon hoti ektos tou hypotaxantos auto ta <b>panta</b><sup>[5]</sup>]</p>
KJV	For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all

	things are put under <i>him</i> , <i>it is</i> manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him.
NIV	For he has put everything under his feet. Now when it says that everything has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ.
NWT	For [God] "subjected all things under his feet." But when he says that 'all things have been subjected,' it is evident that it is with the exception of the one who subjected all things to him.

Thus, Paul himself says that it is *δηλον*, *delon*, 'manifest, clear, evident' that the word *pas* can have exceptions. In this case, when Scripture says that "all things" (*ta panta*) are subjected to Christ, Paul points out that the expression 'all things' has an exception - it does not include God himself. For Paul, this is obvious, as it should be to modern-day readers of the Bible. None of the above-mentioned translations use the word 'other', doubtless reasoning that it is so obvious as to be superfluous.

That the word 'other' is often implicit in the Greek text is admitted even by Robert Bowman, who is a critic of the *New World Translation*. He acknowledges:

It is, of course, legitimate for translators to add the word "other" where this does not change the meaning but simply makes for smoother English (e.g., Luke 11:41-42; 13:2,4).

However, Bowman then adds:

In Colossians 1:16-20, however, adding "other" substantially changes the meaning.<sup>[6]</sup>

In view of Bowman's comment, we must ask whether the inclusion of the word 'other' changes the meaning of the original Greek text. Rolf Furuli explains why this is not the case:

In NWT the use of "all other" four times in Colossians 1 cannot be viewed as bias, and it is not *interpolation*, since the very words of 1:15 reveal that Jesus Christ is a part of creation, which then implies the word "other" in these four places<sup>[7]</sup>

In view of the statement in verse 15 that Christ is the "firstborn of all Creation", the *New World Translation* has a very strong case indeed for its translation.

Of course, it is true that some would render the phrase in Colossians 1:15 as "firstborn *over* all creation" (*New International Version*; emphasis added) or even to paraphrase it - incorrectly - as "firstborn son, superior to all created things" (*Good News Translation*). This is referred to by some as the "genitive of

subordination".<sup>[8]</sup> It is true that *prototokos* can at times figuratively refer to supremacy. However, leaving Colossians 1:15 aside, there is no instance of *prototokos* being used anywhere in the NT or the LXX with a 'genitive of subordination'.<sup>[9]</sup> Furthermore, even if one accepts the extremely dubious conclusion that Colossians 1:15 has a genitive of subordination, that does still not rule out the possibility of Christ's being a created being. Indeed, in view of the information cited previously in this article, there is no reason why *prototokos pases ktiseos* could not be translated as 'firstborn over all other creation'!

Jason Beduhn makes an further point in his book *Truth in Translation*:

So what exactly are objectors to "other" arguing for as the meaning of the phrase "all things"? That Christ created himself (v. 16)? That Christ is before God and that God was made to exist by means of Christ (v. 17)? That Christ, too, needs to be reconciled to God (v. 20)? When we spell out what is denied by the use of "other" we can see clearly how absurd the objection is.<sup>[10]</sup>

The point is obvious: *pas* (all) does not always necessarily mean every person, human or spirit, who is living, has ever lived in the past or will ever live in the future. Common sense must be applied.

### Created 'by Christ' - In What Sense?

This brings us to the exact meaning of the phrase used by Paul to say that everything was created. We can compare the original Greek text with a number of translations.

Greek	οτι εν αυτω εκτισθη τα παντα [ <i>en auto ektisthe ta panta</i> ] εν τοις ουρανοις και επι της γης τα ορατα και τα αορατα ειτε θρονου ειτε κυριότητες ειτε αρχαι ειτε εξουσιαι τα παντα δι αυτου και εις αυτον εκτισται [ <i>ta panta di autou kai eis auton ektistai</i> ]
KJV	For <b>by him were all things created</b> , that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether <i>they be</i> thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: <b>all things were created by him, and for him:</b>
NIV	For <b>by him all things were created</b> : things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; <b>all things were created by him and for him.</b>
NWT	because <b>by means of him all [other] things were created</b> in the heavens and upon the earth, the things visible and the things invisible, no matter whether they are thrones or lordships or governments or authorities. <b>All [other] things have been created through him and for him.</b>

Concerning Colossians 1:16, Albert Barnes claimed: "There could not possibly be a more explicit declaration that the universe was created by Christ, than this."<sup>[11]</sup> But is this truly the case? If Paul had wanted to say that, he could have said, for example: "αυτος εκτισεν τα παντα." (*autos ektisen ta panta*; he created all things) What he actually did say is something quite different.

Paul here uses two prepositions with the Greek verb *ktizo* (κτιζω), create. He says that all (or all other) things were created *en auto* (εν αυτω) and *di' autou* (δι' αυτου). The preposition *en* literally means 'in' and the preposition *dia* (shortened here to *di'*) literally means 'through'.

With regard to the rendering of the expression *en auto*, the *Revised Standard Version* and the *American Standard Version* translate it 'in him.' The *Good News Translation* (formerly *Today's English Version*) renders it 'through him'.<sup>[12]</sup> As for the expression *di' autou*, the same three translations are unanimous in rendering it 'through him'.<sup>[13]</sup>

“The original Greek says that all things were created *by means of* Christ or *through him*, not *by him* as the ultimate agent”

When the *King James Version* was produced in 1611, the word 'by' was frequently used to indicate the means or agent by means of which an action was performed. Thus, in Matthew 1:22, we have "spoken of the Lord, by the prophet", where we today would say "spoken by the Lord, through (or by means of) the prophet." Or Matthew 12:27, "And if I by Beelzebub cast out devils, by whom your children cast them out". So in the *King James Version*, it is clear that the word 'by' frequently has the meaning of 'through' or 'by means of'.

In the twenty-first century, however, a reader seeing the word 'by', particularly after a passive verb, is likely to conclude that reference is being made to the ultimate agent of the verb. To us, a sentence like "The letter was sent by John" is equivalent to saying "John sent the letter". You would understand, not that John carried the letter on behalf of someone else, but that he himself wrote it and sent it. In other words, you would think that the letter came *from* John, not *through* John (which is perhaps how someone living in the 1600's might have understood it). This is a significant difference between seventeenth-century English and today's English.

The translators of the *NIV* clearly recognize this principle, as is seen in their own translation of John 1:17, "the Law was given through Moses". Here *dia* is translated as 'through', not 'by'. Other translations, such as the *Revised Standard Version*, *American Standard Version*, *Good News Translation* and the *New American Standard Bible* likewise use 'through' to translate *dia*.

However, turning back to Colossians 1:16, we see that the *New International Version* has translated both *en auto* and *di' autou* as 'by him'. The problem with this is that modern-day readers are likely to understand 'all things were created by him' as

meaning exactly the same as 'he created all things'. Now this is no doubt what the NIV translators believe, and quite possibly what they want to convey to their readers. But it is not what the Greek says. The Greek says quite clearly *through* Christ, *in* Christ or *by means of* Christ. Just as the Law was given *through* Moses, not by Moses, in the sense that Moses was simply an intermediary and not the ultimate source of the Law, in the same way, creation was accomplished *through* Christ, or *by means of* him, without his being the ultimate source. Thus, the *Good News Translation* correctly renders the first part of Colossians 1:16: "Through him God created everything."

After a verb in the passive voice, the ultimate source of an action in Greek is generally expressed by *υπο* (*hypo*) or occasionally by certain other prepositions without a preposition by the dative case. In such cases, the word after *hypo* may truly become the subject of an active verb with exactly the same meaning. Thus, if Paul had written *υπ' αυτου εκτισθη τα παντα* (*hyp' autou ektisthe ta panta*) that would undoubtedly have meant that Christ was the Creator<sup>[14]</sup>. But that is not what Paul wrote. What he did write is consistent with the teaching that Christ - the Firstborn of creation - was the one *through whom* God created everything and everyone else.

“Other" is implied in "all" and the NW simply makes what is implicit explicit. ”  
Jason Beduhn

## Conclusion

The *New World Translation* has not 'inserted the word *other*' into Colossians 1:16ff, as Stedman asserts. The word 'other' is implied in the preceding word 'all'. It is simply not true to say that "there is absolutely no warrant in the Greek text whatsoever for the insertion of the word 'other'".

It could well be argued that the use of the word 'other', while a valid and correct translation, is not actually necessary. As we have stated above, English, like Greek, sometimes allows the idea of 'other' to be implicit rather than expressed (although nowhere near as frequently as Greek). Thus, if we say "God created everyone", we don't mean that God created himself. This appears to be the position taken by Rolf Furuli, who feels that, as long as the preceding verse (Colossians 1:15) is translated correctly, "the reader is hardly misled if *pas* is translated 'all'."<sup>[15]</sup>

Scholar Jason Beduhn, however, sees the use of the word as valuable:

"Other" is implied in "all" and the NW simply makes what is implicit explicit. You can argue whether it is necessary or not to do this. But I think the objections that have been raised to it show that it is, in fact, necessary, because those who object want to negate the meaning of the phrase "firstborn of creation". If adding "other" prevents this misreading of the Biblical text, then it is useful to have it there.<sup>[16]</sup>

It is easy for critics of the *New World Translation* to criticize certain renderings without giving the full picture. And, indeed, it is quite possible for them to persuade an uninformed reader, using the *Kingdom Interlinear* or a similar work, that the NWT has made an interpolation into the text. Those critics who profess to know Greek should be aware of the facts presented in this article. If they do, they are being deceitful when they claim that the NWT adds words. As for those critics who do not know Greek, it should be obvious that their opinion on the quality of a translation of the New Testament can hardly be trusted.

Thus, when Stedman says that "there is absolutely no warrant in the Greek text for the insertion of the word 'other'," what he is saying is simply not true. The *New World Translation* has neither added to, nor taken away from, God's inspired word.

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[1] Source: [www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/adventure/0252.html](http://www.pbc.org/dp/stedman/adventure/0252.html)

[2] *In Other Words: A Coursebook on Translation*, by Mona Baker, pub. Routledge 1992.

[3] F. Blass and A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961, section.480, p. 254. Trans. by R. W. Funk).

[4] See also Luke 11:42. The *New World Translation* footnote to Colossians 1:16 refers to this verse as an indisputable example of *pas* meaning 'all other'.

[5] *Panta* (παντα) is the neuter plural of *pas* (πας) and means 'all things' or 'everything'.

[6] <http://www.iclnet.org/pub/resources/text/crj/crj0049a.txt>

[7] *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation* (R. Furuli; 1999) pages 260-1.

[8] *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, Daniel Wallace, p. 103-4.

[9] It is really beyond the scope of this article to discuss the proper rendering of προτοκοκς πασης κτισεως (*prototokos pases ktiseos*). For further information, see *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation* (R. Furuli; 1999) pages 246-260 as well as <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/newworldtranslation/colossians1.15.htm>. Additionally, Wes Williams has written on the matter on the B-Greek discussion list <http://www.ibiblio.org/bgreek/test-archives/html4/1997-02/17331.html>.

[10] *Truth in Translation - Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament*, Jason Beduhn, 2003, page 85.

[11] Barnes' *Notes on the New Testament*, Colossians Chapter 1.

<sup>[12]</sup> Furuli (op. cit. page 257, footnote) cites the case of 1 Corinthians 6:2 where he concedes that *en* may point to a direct agent. However, *εν υμιν* (*en hymin*) could just as well be translated as "by means of you", notwithstanding the statement that "the holy ones will judge the world". It is clear that the ultimate source of their authority to judge is God, not they themselves. Interestingly, the Modern Greek (katharevousa) Orthodox translation by Neophytos Vamvas renders *εν αυτω* (*en auto*) as *δι' αυτου* (*di' autou*; through him).

<sup>[13]</sup> Robertson's *Word Pictures in the New Testament* comments on Colossians 1:15: "Through him (*di' autou*). As the intermediate and sustaining agent. He had already used *en autoi* (in him) as the sphere of activity."

<sup>[14]</sup> Wallace's *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics* states on pages 432ff that, after a verb in the passive voice, the prepositions *hypo*, *apo* and *para* indicate the ultimate source, *dia* indicates the intermediate agent, and *en* and *ek*, as well as the dative case without a preposition, indicate an impersonal means.

<sup>[15]</sup> *The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation* (R. Furuli; 1999) pages 246-260

<sup>[16]</sup> *Truth in Translation - Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament*, Jason Beduhn, 2003, page 85

## Who is the Archangel Michael?

Some critics get very upset about Jehovah's Witnesses' teaching that the Archangel Michael and Jesus are the same person. Is this idea supported in the Bible?

Michael is mentioned five times in the Bible. Here are the references. All scripture citations in this essay are from the *King James Version*.

ובעת ההיא יעמד מיכאל השר הגדול העמד עלי־בני עמך  
והיתה עת צרה אשר לא־נהיתה מהיות גוי עד העת ההיא  
ובעת ההיא ימלט עמך כלי־הנמצא כתוב בספר:

### Daniel 12:1 in Hebrew

*Daniel 10:13* - But the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me; and I remained there with the kings of Persia.

*Daniel 10:21* - But I will shew thee that which is noted in the scripture of truth: and there is none that holdeth with me in these things, but Michael your prince.

*Daniel 12:1* - And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book.

*Jude 9* - Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

*Revelation 12:7-9* - And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

One site, critical of Jehovah's Witnesses, says: "in all of these verses nothing remotely hints to Jesus being Michael". Is that the case?

### What can we learn from the above verses about Michael?

- He is "one of the chief princes". (Hebrew: *sarim*)
- He helped an angel stand against the 'prince of the kingdom of Persia'.
- He is referred to as "Michael your Prince" (the 'your' being plural in Hebrew)
- He will be 'standing for the children of [Daniel's] people'.
- He will 'stand up' just before the greatest ever 'time of trouble'.
- He is called 'the archangel'
- He contended with the devil.
- He did not dare bring about a 'railing accusation'.
- He left it to God to rebuke the devil.
- He has 'his angels'.
- He battled against the devil.
- He threw the devil and his angels out of heaven.

### What other references are there to an archangel in the Bible?

*1 Thessalonians 4:16* - For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the

dead in Christ shall rise first: (This is the only other reference to an archangel in the Bible.)

### What Some Commentators Have Said

Many who criticise Jehovah's Witnesses for their views don't realise that a number of Protestant sources agree with the Witness position.



"As we stated yesterday, Michael may mean an angel; but I embrace the opinion of those who refer this to the person of Christ, because it suits the subject best to represent him as standing forward for the defense of his elect people." - John Calvin. (See Calvin's writings online at [http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm\\_vol25/htm/vii.htm](http://www.ccel.org/c/calvin/comment3/comm_vol25/htm/vii.htm))

"Michael - Christ alone is the protector of his church, when all the princes of the earth desert or oppose it." - John Wesley's commentary on Daniel 10:21. (See Wesley's writings online at [http://wesley.nnu.edu/john\\_wesley/notes/daniel.htm](http://wesley.nnu.edu/john_wesley/notes/daniel.htm))

"a) The angel here notes two things: first that the Church will be in great affliction and trouble at Christ's coming, and next that God will send his angel to deliver it, whom he here calls Michael, meaning Christ, who is proclaimed by the preaching of the Gospel." - Geneva Bible Commentary. (See <http://www.ccel.org/g/geneva/notes/Daniel/12.html>)

### Putting the Pieces together

- Michael will 'stand up'. Note that in verses 2, 3, 21 those standing up are said to be *kings*. Likewise, Michael's 'standing up' in Daniel 12:1 is appropriate, because he, too, is a King. Daniel 7:13, 14 foretell how the 'Son of Man' - Christ - would become a King.
- When Michael 'stands up' a time of distress begins. This time - mentioned in Daniel 12:1 is indisputably the 'great tribulation' referred to in Matthew 24:21. The language used shows there can be only one such event. Jesus told of this great tribulation in answer to the disciples' question: "What shall be the sign of thy [i.e. Jesus'] coming and the end of the world?" (Matthew 24:3). This is a very strong indication that Michael is Jesus. When Michael 'stands up', Christ

'comes', and then there is a 'great tribulation'.

- Revelation 12:7 refers to 'Michael and *his* angels.' Similarly, "the Son of Man shall send forth *his angels*" (Matthew 13:41), the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels (Matthew 16:27); "he [the Son of Man] shall send his angels" (Matthew 24:31). 2 Thessalonians 1:7 tells us that: the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with *his* mighty angels." The fact that this expression ('his angels') is used with regard to both Michael and Christ, strongly suggests that they are one and the same.

“ Whose angels - Michael's or Christ's? ”
- Michael is "the great Prince" (Daniel 12:1) or "your [Israel's] Prince" (Daniel 10:21); also "one of the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13). The Hebrew term *sar*, prince, is used prophetically of the Messiah in Isaiah 9:6, 7.
- Michael is the Prince "which standeth for the children of [Daniel's] people", i.e. Israel. This identifies him with the "captain [Hebrew: *sar*] of the host of the LORD" who met Joshua (Joshua 5:14). Jehovah's Witnesses and evangelical Bible commentators alike agree that this was the prehuman Word of God.
- The fact that Michael is "one of the chief princes" (Daniel 10:13) does not rule out his being Christ in his prehuman existence. It does not even preclude his being unique, as some critics claim! Why should all princes have equal rank? England's Prince Charles doesn't have the same rank as Prince Andrew or Edward! 'Princes' (plural) implies at least two. Since God himself is called "the Prince of the host" and "the Prince of princes" (Daniel 8:11, 25), there is no reason why the two "chief princes" should not be God and Christ.
- The fact that Michael 'disputed about the body of Moses with the devil', presumably during the lifetime of Joshua, also strongly indicates that he was the 'captain of the host of the LORD' referred to in Joshua 5:14.
- The fact that he did not dare 'bring against [the devil] a railing accusation' does not prove that Michael is not Christ. True, Christ *did* rebuke the demons, but he certainly did not bring about 'railing accusations' against them. The Greek κρισιν βλασφημιας (*krisin blasphemias*) has been rendered 'slanderous judgment' (Analytical-Literal Translation), 'abusive condemnation' (Amplified Bible), 'insulting words' (Good News Translation), 'slanderous accusation' (New International Version). Michael refused to lower himself to the level of the opposers

- mentioned in Jude's letter, who *did dare* to bring 'railing accusations' against those who deserved glory. In fact, he would not even resort to abusive speech against the devil himself. That is all.
- The word 'archangel' means chief angel. The word is only used in the singular in the Bible - in connection with Michael and with Christ. This strongly suggests that they are the same person.
  - The fact that Strong's Dictionary calls Gabriel an 'archangel' is neither here nor there, because the Bible doesn't!
  - The fact that Daniel 10:13 in *An American Translation* and Moffat's translation uses the expression 'one of the archangels' is likewise irrelevant, because the Hebrew does not say 'archangels,' but rather 'chief [or first] princes'.
  - Jesus will "descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). As Hal Flemings commented: "If Jesus is not the archangel in this event and he is superior to the archangel, then why would he perform this act as though he was someone of lower rank? Wouldn't he be using an archangel's voice because he is an archangel?"
  - It is really straining the sense of 1 Thessalonians 4:16 to say that he is just accompanied by an archangel, who calls out. When we say: "He ran in with a shout," we understand that it is the same person who is running and shouting! If you say: "He walked in with a trumpet blast," on the other hand, you are not implying that it is he who was blowing the trumpet (although he might be). The two cases are clearly different.
  - A reasonably close parallel to 'εν φωνη αρχαγγελου, *en phone archangelou* (with an/the archangel's voice) in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 is at 2 Peter 2:16: "the dumb ass speaking with man's voice". Here we have 'εν φωνη, *en phone*' (with the/a voice) together with a genitive. The donkey was speaking with a man's voice - but it was the donkey that was speaking, not a man nearby. Likewise, in all other cases where 'en phone' is used in the NT, the voice in question always belongs to the subject of the sentence, not some unspecified

“ According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16, the dead are raised when they hear the archangel's voice. But John 5:28 states that the voice they hear is Christ's! ”

third person. - See Revelation 5:2; 14:7, 9; 18:1.

- When the archangel's voice is heard, "the dead in Christ shall rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16). But John 5:28, 29 tells us: "all that are in the graves shall hear his [Christ's, not just any angel's] voice and shall come forth." Both verses use the Greek word *φωνη phone* - once for the archangel's voice, once for the Son of Man's voice, following which the resurrection takes place. One voice, not two, is heard. Logically, then, we must conclude that there is one voice because there is one person.
- When Revelation 12 says that Michael and his angels fought with the devil and his angels, throwing them out of heaven, this is a clear reference to Jesus Christ. It is Christ, not just an angel, who destroys him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. (Hebrews 2:14) According to Matthew Henry's commentary: "The parties- Michael and his angels on one side, and the dragon and his angels on the other: Christ, the great Angel of the covenant, and his faithful followers; and Satan and all his instruments." 
- Isaiah 9:6 refers to Christ as 'Wonderful, Counselor'. Interestingly, the Greek Septuagint refers to Christ as 'μεγαλης βουλης αγγελος, *megales boules aggelos*' - 'Messenger (or Angel) of Great Counsel.'
- The demons know who is going to abyss them. They said: "What have we to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of God? art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" (Matthew 8:29) "And they besought him that he would not command them to go out into the deep [Greek: *αβυσσος, abyssos*]." In Revelation 20:1-3, John tells us: "And I saw an *angel* come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit [Greek: *αβυσσος, abyssos*]" . Thus, we see that the Bible implies that Christ the angel of the abyss.
- The objection that Christ can not be called an angel, because Hebrews 1:4 says that he was "made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they" is unfounded. Note that he *inherited, obtained* the name, not that he always had it. When Hebrews chapter 1 refers to the angels, it means the angels in general. It does not necessarily have to imply that Christ can't be called an angel. When Luke 21:29 refers to "the fig tree and all the trees", it doesn't mean that the fig tree isn't a tree too. Likewise, when the Bible refers to Christ and the angels, it doesn't have to imply

that he's not an angel.

- Clearly, although Jesus *is* called an angel in the Bible, he is far from being like the other angels. The Watchtower commented: "The basic meaning of "angel" (Hebrew, *mal·'akh* ; Greek, *ag̃ge·los*) is "messenger." As the "Word" (Greek, *lõgos*), Jesus is God's messenger *par excellence*." (15/12/1984, page 29.)

## Early Watchtowers and Michael

Some will point out that, at first, the doctrinal journal of Jehovah's Witnesses, *The Watchtower* (at the time called *Zion's Watch Tower*), did not teach that Michael was Jesus: the first issue of July 1879 reprint page (RP) 9 and the November 1879 issue RP48 distinguished between Jesus and Michael on the basis of Hebrews 1:6. Curiously enough, both articles were written by J. H. Paton, who in 1881 became a skeptic and split off, and indicate a controversy on the matter of identifying Michael with Christ or not. While he was still a contributor though, the November 1880 article RP152-3 did make a connection with Michael and Christ. Then after Paton left, the June 1883 issue RP490, in the article "The Arch-Angel," clearly identified Michael as Christ:

While we are not directly told who is Jehovah's chief-messenger, except that his name was called Michael, the thought suggests itself, Can it be that he who was called Michael—Jehovah's chief-messenger—was none other than our Lord in his pre-human condition? ... Jesus and the arch-angel are identical. ... We reason that this *Great Prince*—Michael—Jehovah's chief-messenger, is none other than the Lord of glory.

Some critics find it odd that the first issues of *The Watchtower* did not recognize that Michael is the same person as Christ. Well, when a deeper study of the scriptures shows that we are mistaken, what should we do? What Jehovah's Witnesses did about 123 years ago is what their critics should do now: admit and correct their mistaken understanding. (While a separate interpretation of the Michael in Revelation 12 was first published in the December 1879 issue RP55, this was corrected in the first article of the historic March 1, 1925 issue.)

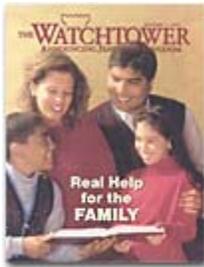
## Conclusion

The evidence is overwhelming. Far from there being "nothing [that] remotely hints to Jesus being Michael," the above comparisons make it abundantly clear that they are one and the same.

## The Problem with "False Prophecy" Polemics

Suppose I had access to everything you had done or said since you were a little child, stored on a computer. It would be a simple matter for me to pick out a hundred or two hundred of the worst things you'd said and done over the course of your life, to write them up in a list with dates, times and places and then to proclaim, in the same way as a correspondent did in one of his emails to me: "The question is not what you have got wrong, but whether you got anything right." On the other hand, by a similar process of selecting the 100-200 kindest, most generous, loving things you'd done, I could equally make you look like a saint. Both pictures would be true in a sense, but neither would be the whole truth. Why is this important?

In the last 125 years, Jehovah's Witnesses have published literally millions of words in publications such as *The Watchtower*. This includes powerful arguments against atheism and the theory of evolution, eloquent defenses of the Bible as the inspired word of God, articles upholding the Bible's stance on moral issues such as abortion, fornication, adultery and homosexual lifestyles. Watchtower publications have long exhorted their readers to display Christian qualities and imitate Jesus. They have shown how applying the Bible's counsel can benefit family life. Through *The Watchtower*, millions of people have been comforted by the Bible's message of hope.



You might expect that evangelical Christian organizations would happily applaud most of the above. After all, evangelical Christians believe in God and reject evolution, consider the Bible to be God's inspired word, oppose sexual sins and abortion. They, too, speak of the need to imitate Jesus and display Christlike qualities. You would expect, then, that evangelical Christian groups could find a lot of positive things to say about *The Watchtower*. You'd think they'd congratulate Jehovah's Witnesses for energetically spreading the above-mentioned views throughout the world and in literally hundreds of languages. But you would be wildly wrong.

An analysis of quotations from *The Watchtower* and other Jehovah's Witness publications made by evangelical Christian writers - particularly on the Internet, but also in print - reveals that, far from commending Witness literature for all the positive material they publish, these writers consistently attack Jehovah's Witnesses and actively seek anything that could possibly be used to discredit them - including many things published more than 100 years ago!

You could compare their attitude with that of a man who visits one of the world's most beautiful cities - say Vienna. Instead of touring the most attractive parts of the city, though, this man visits the Municipal Garbage Dump and photographs the rubbish there. Then he goes to the industrial area and photographs the factories. Everywhere he goes he looks for the ugliest, most sordid parts of the city. Making copious use of close-ups to highlight the least attractive parts and using the most unflattering camera angles, he ensures his pictures give the worst possible impression. Then, on his return home, he shows the photographs to his friends, to convince them that Vienna is the most awful city in the world.

In resorting to similar tactics, critics of Witness publications immediately reveal their bias. The Watchtower Society is their ideological opponent, to be defeated at all costs. They comb through old *Watchtowers*, going back as far as 130 years. They take whatever suits their purpose and ignore the rest. They rip quotes out of their context, attempting to make it look as though they say much more than they actually meant. Why do they do it? They do it because it is their job to do it! In short, they are far from being an objective source of information.

Frankly, few Jehovah's Witnesses are likely to be taken in by such chicanery. It is easy to detect an agenda behind this type of mudslinging. Just about anyone who wanted to believe it has already done so. And as for the rest of us, what hasn't killed us has made us stronger.

But we should not reject a person's criticism simply because we feel it is wrongly motivated. Prejudiced and hate-filled people can sometimes be at least partially right. As Christians, we should be discerning, remembering the admonition of the proverb, "anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word." (Proverbs 14:15) With that in mind, let us examine the assertions commonly made in anti-Witness literature concerning the Witnesses' alleged "false prophecies".

### Taken Out of Context

The standard technique of critics appears to be to present a list of alleged "false prophecies", the longer the better. There are dozens of such lists on the Internet. These take the form of quotations from The Watchtower and other Witness publications.

“ We have not the gift of prophecy ”

Zion's Watch Tower, July 1883.

Whereas the majority of the quotes themselves are accurate, the context in which they were presented - both the immediate context of the printed page and the historical context - is omitted. Selective quotations ensure that anything that gives the impression of certainty is usually included, whereas any cautionary statements are omitted.

We are not for a moment denying that the publications - in particular the earlier ones - have at times published information that was speculative in nature and turned out to be mistaken. But the fact is that, for each of the dates commonly touted by critics as 'false prophecies' (1874, 1914, 1925, 1975), Watch Tower publications had published cautionary statements to the effect that it was by no means certain what would happen. Consider, for example, the following statements, which emphasise that the basis for the conclusions was *Bible study* not some message from God: [11](#)

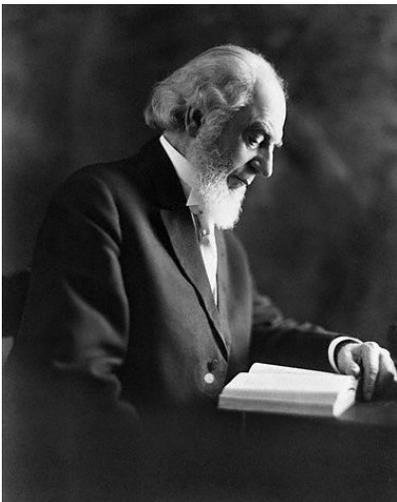
**With regard to 1874:** It should be noted that 'The Watchtower' was not published until 1879 and Russell himself did not become aware of the 1874 date until 1876! So it was hardly a matter of a failed prediction.

**With regard to 1914:** : "We are not prophesying; we are merely giving our surmises . . . We do not even aver that there is no mistake in our *interpretation* of prophecy and our calculations of chronology. We have merely

laid these before you, leaving it for each to exercise his own faith or doubt in respect to them" (emphasis added).<sup>[2]</sup>

**With regard to 1925:** "The year 1925 is here. With great expectation Christians have looked forward to this year. Many have confidently expected that all members of the body of Christ will be changed to heavenly glory during this year. This may be accomplished. It may not be. In his own due time God will accomplish his purposes concerning his people. Christians should not be so deeply concerned about what may transpire this year."<sup>[3]</sup>

**With regard to 1975:** 'What about the year 1975? What is it going to mean, dear friends?' asked Brother Franz. 'Does it mean that Armageddon is going to be finished, with Satan bound, by 1975? It could! It could! All things are possible with God. Does it mean that Babylon the Great is going to go down by 1975? It could. Does it mean that the attack of Gog of Magog is going to be made on Jehovah's witnesses to wipe them out, then Gog himself will be put out of action? It could. But we are not saying. All things are possible with God. But we are not saying. And *don't any of you be specific in saying anything that is going to happen between now and 1975.*'<sup>[4]</sup>



It's obvious, therefore, that the situation was by no means as clear-cut as Watchtower opposers would have us believe. By omitting these more cautionary statements, many of which are in the same articles as the quotations they like to print, enemies of Jehovah's Witnesses give a misleading picture of events and endeavour to make a suggested interpretation look like a prophecy.

### No Claim of Inspiration

Not to be overlooked is the larger context of the role of the Watch Tower publications. Whereas Watchtower writers undoubtedly pray for God's blessing on their work and sincerely believe that God answers these prayers, they make no pretensions of being inspired, infallible or perfect. Consider the following extracts from Watch Tower publications, which prove that this is the case. (This is just a small selection of examples. Many more could be cited, but care has been taken to include at least one example for every decade since *The Watchtower* began to be published.)

**1870s:** We do not object to changing our opinions on any subject, or discarding former *applications* of prophecy, or any other scripture, when we see a good reason for the change,—in fact, it is important that we should be willing to unlearn errors and mere traditions, as to learn truth.... It is our duty to "prove all things."—by the unerring Word,—and *hold fast* to that which is good."

**1880s:** "We have *not* the gift of prophecy."<sup>[5]</sup>

1890s: *Nor would we have our writings revered or regarded as infallible, or on a par with the holy Scriptures.* The most we claim or have ever claimed for our teachings is that they are what we believe to be harmonious *interpretations of the divine Word*, in harmony with the spirit of the truth. And we still urge, as in the past, that *each reader study the subjects we present in the light of the Scriptures, proving all things by the Scriptures, accepting what they see to be thus approved, and rejecting all else.* It is to this end, to enable the student to trace the subject in the divinely inspired Record, that we so freely intersperse both quotations and citations of the Scriptures upon which to build.<sup>[6]</sup>

“ We do not even aver that there is no mistake in our interpretation of prophecy and our calculations of chronology. ”

*Zion's Watch Tower,*  
1908

1900s: *It is not our intention to enter upon the role of prophet to any degree, but merely to give below what seems to us rather likely to be the trend of events—giving also the reasons for our expectations.*<sup>[7]</sup>

Someone may ask, Do you, then, claim infallibility and that every sentence appearing in "The Watch Tower" publications is stated with absolute correctness? Assuredly we make no such claim and have never made such a claim. What motive can our opponents have in so charging against us? Are they not seeking to set up a falsehood to give themselves excuse for making attacks and to endeavor to pervert the judgments of others?<sup>[8]</sup>

1910s: However, we should not denounce those who *in a proper spirit* express their dissent in respect to the date mentioned [1914] and what may there be expected . . . We must admit that there are possibilities of our having made a mistake in respect to the chronology, even though we do not see where any mistake has been made in calculating the seven times of the Gentiles as expiring about October 1, 1914.<sup>[9]</sup>

1920s: Many students have made the grievous mistake of thinking that God has inspired men to interpret prophecy. The holy prophets of the Old Testament were inspired by Jehovah to write as his power moved upon them. The writers of the New Testament were clothed with certain power and authority to write as the Lord directed them. However, *since the days of the apostles no man on earth has been inspired to write prophecy, nor has any man been inspired to interpret prophecy.*<sup>[10]</sup>

1930s: We are not a prophet; we merely believe that we have come to the place where the Gentile times have ended.<sup>[11]</sup>

1940s: This pouring out of God's spirit upon the flesh of all his faithful anointed witnesses *does not mean those now serving as Jehovah's Witnesses are inspired. It does not mean that the writings in this magazine The Watchtower are inspired and infallible and without mistakes.* It does not mean that the president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society is inspired and infallible, *although enemies falsely charge us with believing so...* But we confess with

the Scriptures that *the day of such inspiration passed long before 1870*, as the apostle Paul showed it would. . . . *Inspired speaking and writing passed away with the last of the twelve apostles*, by whom the gifts of the spirit were imparted to others. Yet God is still able to teach and lead us. *While confessing no inspiration for today for anyone on earth*, we do have the privilege of praying God for more of his holy spirit and for his guidance of us by the bestowal of his spirit through Jesus Christ. [\[12\]](#)

**1950s:** *The Watchtower does not claim to be inspired in its utterances*, nor is it dogmatic. It invites careful and critical examination of its contents in the light of the Scriptures. [\[13\]](#)

**1960s:** The book [*Life Everlasting in Freedom of Sons of God*] merely presents the chronology. You can accept it or reject it. [\[14\]](#)

Our chronology, however, . . . is reasonably accurate (but admittedly not infallible). [\[15\]](#)

“Don't any of you be specific in saying anything that is going to happen between now and 1975”

F. W. Franz, quoted in *The Watchtower*, 15 October 1966, page 231.

**1970s:** In this regard, however, it must be observed that this “faithful and discreet slave” was never inspired, never perfect. Those writings by certain members of the “slave” class that came to form the Christian part of God’s Word were inspired and infallible, but that is not true of other writings since. Things published were not perfect in the days of Charles Taze Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society; nor were they perfect in the days of J. F. Rutherford, the succeeding president. The increasing light on God’s Word as well as the facts of history have repeatedly required that adjustments of one kind or another be made down to the very present time. [\[16\]](#)

**1980s:** It is not claimed that the explanations in this publication are infallible. Like Joseph of old, we say: “Do not interpretations belong to God?” (Genesis 40:8) At the same time, however, we firmly believe that the explanations set forth herein harmonize with the Bible in its entirety, showing how remarkably divine prophecy has been fulfilled in the world events of our catastrophic times. [\[17\]](#)

**1990s:** Those who make up the one true Christian organization today do not have angelic revelations or divine inspiration. But they do have the inspired Holy Scriptures, which contain revelations of God’s thinking and will. As an organization and individually, they must accept the Bible as divine truth, study it carefully, and let it work in them. [\[18\]](#)

**2000s:** Although the slave class is defined as “faithful and discreet,” Jesus did not say that it would be infallible. This group of faithful anointed brothers still consists of imperfect Christians. Even with the best of intentions, they can be mistaken, as such men sometimes were in the first century. [\[19\]](#)

It's therefore quite clear that Jehovah's Witnesses make no claim to divine inspiration for their publications. Thus, the critics' assertion that "the Watch Tower claims to be an inspired prophet" is manifestly false.

### Did Haydon Covington concede that the Watch Tower is a False Prophet?

Did Haydon Covington concede in the *Walsh* trial that the Watch Tower Society has promulgated false prophecy, as is stated by critics? Even if he had done so, what would that have proved? If Covington had said that the thought the Society was a false prophet, then he would have been mistaken, that is all. However, a look at the court record (even as it is quoted on anti-Witness web pages) shows that Covington did nothing of the sort.

The court records show that Covington said: "I do not think we have promulgated false prophecy ... there have been statements that were erroneous, that is the way I put it, and mistaken." When asked *hypothetically* if it would have been a false prophecy if the Society had authoritatively promulgated 1874 as the date for the return of Christ's coming, Covington himself pointed out that this was only an *assumption*, and is then recorded as having said the words "I agree that". This is an incomplete sentence in English. Now it could very well be that he was interrupted and was not intending to agree that a false prophecy had been made. If we take the court to read "I agree to that", he was simply agreeing *hypothetically* that the Society would have been guilty of false prophecy under a certain set of circumstances, namely if it had promulgated as authoritative that Christ returned in 1874. Now the records show that Covington had not studied the Society's literature relating to 1874, saying "you are speaking of a matter that I know nothing of." So, Covington's comments, viewed in their proper context do not prove the point Witness critics are trying to make. Covington certainly did not mean that the Society was responsible for a false prophecy, as he had just a few moments earlier stated the very opposite. And as we have seen, the Society did not 'authoritatively promulgate' 1874 as the date, it merely presented it to its readers to decide for themselves.

“ Critics' allegations that 'The Watchtower claims to be an inspired prophet' are manifestly false ”

Of course, Witnesses *do* believe that God is using them - and their publications - to accomplish his work. But that is not the same as believing that God personally directs the writing of Watchtower Publications in the way that he inspired the Bible. The above quotations - and many others - show that at no time in the history of the organization has it claimed to be God's prophet, inspired or infallible.<sup>[20]</sup>

It is evident here that critics are setting up a *straw man* argument. In other words, they are imputing to Watch Tower a position that it does not claim for itself and then refuting *that* position, instead of the Society's actual position. This is really nothing but a dishonest debating trick.

Thus, the Watch Tower quotations, taken in context and stripped of all hyperbole and rhetoric, establish basically one thing only: that Watch Tower publications have on a

number of occasions presented interpretations of Bible prophecies which later turned out to be incorrect. It is not possible to argue on the basis of the Watchtower literature that (1) the Society claims that its literature is inspired of God or infallible, (2) that it claimed to speak in the name of God as a prophet.

Admittedly, it would certainly have been better for all concerned had the publications refrained from publishing such speculative interpretations, which doubtless led to disappointment for many. 'The Watchtower', far from covering over these facts, has admitted openly that this is the case, as is seen from the following extract from *The Watchtower*.

In its issue of July 15, 1976, *The Watchtower*, commenting on the inadvisability of setting our sights on a certain date, stated: "If anyone has been disappointed through not following this line of thought, he should now concentrate on adjusting his viewpoint, seeing that it was not the word of God that failed or deceived him and brought disappointment, but that his own understanding was based on wrong premises." In saying "anyone," *The Watchtower* included all disappointed ones of Jehovah's Witnesses, hence including *persons having to do with the publication of the information* that contributed to the buildup of hopes centered on that date.<sup>[21]</sup>

Thus the Watch Tower Society has recognised that it was a mistake to speculate. But was it the only ever religious organization to make such a mistake?

### Double Standards and Bigotry

If Jehovah's Witnesses have had mistaken expectations about the fulfillment of Bible prophecies, they are far from alone. Many other students of the Bible - including some highly respected Catholic and Protestant writers - have made similar mistakes to Jehovah's Witnesses. Whole books have been written on the subject of predictions that failed to come true, but let's look at just three examples from the world of Protestantism: Martin Luther, John Wesley and Billy Graham.

Protestant leader **Martin Luther**, believed that the end would come in his day. He believed the Turkish war would be "the final wrath of God, in which the world will come to an end and Christ will come to destroy Gog and Magog and set free His own"<sup>[22]</sup> and that "Christ has given a sign by which one can know when the Judgment Day is near. When the Turk will have an end, we can



certainly predict that the Judgment must be at the door"<sup>[23]</sup>

Methodist founder **John Wesley** wrote: "1836 The end of the non-chronos, and of the many kings; the fulfilling of the word, and of the mystery of God; the repentance of the survivors in the great city; the end of the 'little time,' and of the three times and a half; the destruction of the east; the imprisonment of Satan."<sup>[24]</sup>

In 1950, **Billy Graham**, the well-known US evangelist, told a rally in Los Angeles: "I sincerely believe that the Lord draweth nigh. We may have another year, maybe two years, to work for Jesus Christ, and, Ladies and Gentlemen, I believe it is all going to be over ... two years and it's all going to be over."<sup>[25]</sup>



If it had been Jehovah's Witnesses who had said the things that Luther, Wesley and Graham proclaimed, these proclamations would have been added to the list of quotations supposedly proving that the Witnesses are false prophets. Unsurprisingly, however, the sources that attack the Witnesses for

for the enemy's first atomic bomb? New York! Secondly, Chicago; and thirdly, the city of Los Angeles." "My own theory about Communism," he said in 1957, "is that it is master-minded by Satan." Like most nativist prophets, Graham predicted the imminent end of the world: "I sincerely believe that the Lord draweth nigh." "We may have another year, maybe two years," he said in 1950, "to work for Jesus Christ, and [then], ladies and gentlemen, I believe it is all going to be over. . . . Two years, and it's all going to be over." Two years later he said, "Unless this nation turns to Christ within the next few months, I despair of its future."

false prophecy do not generally take the same position when it comes to Protestant figures who have made very similar errors.

This should give all of us food for thought. If a newspaper editor were to publish in

his paper all the crimes committed by members of just one ethnic group or race, dwelling on them in great detail, even repeatedly bringing up very old offences, but at the same time, ignoring all the crimes committed by members of another group (perhaps his own), then thinking people who looked at the facts would conclude that he was nothing but a bigot. What are we to think, then, when certain ones opposed to Jehovah's Witnesses constantly harp on what they incorrectly and maliciously term "false prophecies" of the organization, reproducing *ad nauseam* the same quotations from Watch Tower literature, the majority of which were published almost 100 years ago, while remaining deadly silent about all similar errors by those who share their theological convictions? Is the word 'bigoted' any less appropriate? At any rate, their agenda is obvious and respect for the truth is not high on their list of priorities.

“Were Martin Luther, John Wesley and Billy Graham false prophets?”

I do not think that the comments of Luther, Wesley or Graham make them false prophets, for the same reason that I don't accept that the Watch Tower is a false prophet, namely, that interpreting Bible prophecy is not the same as prophesying.

## Prophecy and Interpretation

It is true that Jehovah's Witnesses believe they are being guided by God. But, 'guidance' is a much broader concept than 'inspiration'. True, inspiration is a form of guidance, but it is only one form. In this regard, Stafford makes a very telling point:

It cannot truthfully be said that to be inspired by God to produce flawless information is the same as being guided or lead by a flawless source, whether

that source be the Scriptures or an angel sent by God. Why? Because in the former case the person is taken over by God, given a vision, revelation (sometimes in a dream), or put into a trance. The person then receives God's thoughts and will which are then channelled through the individual, providing information he or she would otherwise not have known. However, in the latter case one could simply misunderstand or ignore the directions given, which would make the accuracy of what they do or say dependent upon whether or not they correctly understood the inspired source. [\[26\]](#)

“Prophecy” involves much more than simply predicting the future. It involves claiming to have a message directly from God. It is not the same as interpreting events or even interpreting the prophetic parts of the Bible. Russell understood this and that is why he said: “The most we claim or have ever claimed for our teachings is that they are what we believe to be harmonious *interpretations of the divine Word*, in harmony with the spirit of the truth”, adding “*we are far from claiming any direct plenary inspiration*” [\[27\]](#)

Similarly, when Wesley drew the conclusion that the end would come in 1836, he did so on the basis of his understanding of the Bible. Of course, this understanding turned out to be completely and utterly wrong, but that does not make him a false prophet. When Billy Graham stated in 1950 that the end would come within two years, he was not claiming that God had personally spoken to him through a dream or a vision. He was just stating what he believed after comparing world events with what he knew from the Bible. No charitable person would accuse Graham of being a false prophet because of that (although it is obvious that he did make an error of judgment). Likewise, when Luther stated that the Turkish war would lead to the end of the world, he was woefully mistaken, but that certainly does not make him a false prophet. Incidentally, Luther, on the basis of his understanding of the Bible, also contradicted Copernicus and insisted that the earth was the centre of the universe! [\[28\]](#)

“ The Watch Tower Society is not a false prophet, for the simple reason that it is not a prophet. ”

Thus, the Watch Tower Society is not a false prophet, for the simple reason that it is not a prophet. It makes no claim that any of its members have heard voices from God, seen visions or in any other way been directly influenced to make a certain proclamation beyond what is in the Bible. It *has* made mistakes in explaining or interpreting parts of the Bible, but as we have seen, so have other religious organizations.

## Conclusion

On the basis of the above, critics of Jehovah's Witnesses have some questions to answer:

(1) Do they think it is truthful and fair to focus on a minute selection of the Watch Tower's published material - the most negative part - and ignore everything else?

(2) Can they cite the Watch Tower publication where the Society claims to be an "inspired prophet" (their expression, not ours). On what do they base that conclusion, and how do they explain the dozens of quotations I have presented from the Society's literature - from all periods of its history - where the Society denies that?<sup>[29]</sup>

(3) Why do they present the Watchtower's statements about future events as prophetic statements, rather than what they really were - interpretations?

(4) Do they believe that others who have had mistaken expectations, including Martin Luther, John Wesley and Billy Graham, are false prophets, and if not, why not?

Jehovah's Witnesses do not believe that they should be above honest criticism and have not hidden the fact that they have made errors in their interpretations. But honest criticism implies respect for truth - the whole truth, not just extracts taken out of context and twisted to give an impression that they were never intended to give.

**Beware of half truths. You might end up believing the wrong half!**

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### Footnotes and References

<sup>[1]</sup> I am grateful to other Witness writers for bringing many of these citations to my attention. Additionally, the book *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. [JWD2]* by Greg Stafford contains extensive research on this matter. Quotations from publications after 1950 are generally taken from the *Watchtower Library 2003* CD-ROM. Almost all Russell's writings are freely available on the Internet.

<sup>[2]</sup> *Zion's Watch Tower*, January 1, 1908 (reprint) page 4110

<sup>[3]</sup> *The Watch Tower*, January 1, 1925, page 3.

<sup>[4]</sup> *The Watchtower*, 15 October 1966, page 631.

<sup>[5]</sup> *Zion's Watch Tower*, January 1883, page 425.

<sup>[6]</sup> *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, 15 December 1896, reprint, 2080 (emphasis added).

<sup>[7]</sup> "Views From the Watch Tower," *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, 1 March 1904, reprint, 3327 (emphasis added).

<sup>[8]</sup> *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, 15 September 1909, reprint, 4473.

[9] *The Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, 15 November 1913, repr. 5348 (emphasis added).

[10] *Prophecy* (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1929), 61-62 (emphasis added).

[11] *Light*, vol. 1 (Brooklyn: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1930), 194 (emphasis added).

[12] *The Watchtower*, 15 May 1947, pp. 157-8.

[13] "Name and Purpose of the Watchtower," *The Watchtower*, 15 August 1950, 262-263 (emphasis added)

[14] *The Watchtower*, 15 October 1966, page 631.

[15] *The Watchtower*, 15 August 1968, page 499.

[16] *The Watchtower*, 1 March 1979, page 23-24.

[17] *Revelation - Its Grand Climax at Hand*, page 9. (Published 1988)

[18] *Jehovah's Witnesses - Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, page 708 (Published 1993)

[19] *The Watchtower*, 1 December 2002, page 17.

[20] Occasionally, *The Watchtower* (for example 1 April 1972) has referred to true Christians (not specifically to the writers of Watch Tower publications) as "prophets". However, the word is placed in inverted commas, which shows that it is not meant literally. The 1972 article is simply drawing parallels between experiences in the life of the prophet Ezekiel and those of Christians today as they fulfil Christ's commission to preach to all the nations. This sense of the word 'prophecy' is recognised by many 'mainstream' Christians. Billy Graham's biography is called "A prophet with Honor". Pope John Paul II spoke of 'the 'prophetic office' of the People of God - meaning their responsibility to give a Christian witness. (<http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pope0264of.htm>) In view of other comments (cited in the main article) in which the Society specifically repudiates prophet status, both before and after this article was published, attempts to use this article to demonstrate that the Watch Tower Society claims to be an inspired prophet are obviously misrepresenting the sense of the article.

[21] *The Watchtower*, 15 March 1980, page 17-18.

[22] John T. Baldwin, "Luther's Eschatological Appraisal of the Turkish Threat in *Eine Heerpredigt -wider den Tuerken* [Army Sermon Against the Turks]," *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 33.2 (Autumn 1995), 196.

[23] *Ibid*, p. 201.

[24] <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/wesley/notes.i.xxviii.xxiii.html>

[25] McLoughlin, William G., 1978 *Revivals, Awakenings and Reform*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago. pp.185. See also "US News and World Report" (December 19, 1994)

[26] *Jehovah's Witnesses Defended, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, Greg Stafford, pp. 462-3.

[27] *Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence*, 15 July 1899, reprint, 2506

[28] Luther is also quoted on certain websites as having said that Jesus would return 300 years from his time. (*The Familiar Discourses of Dr. Martin Luther*, trans. by Henry Bell and revised by Joseph Kerby [London: Baldwin, Craddock and Joy, 1818], pp. 7,8.) I have not been able to verify this source, although I have no reason to doubt it.

[29] A computer search for the expression "inspired prophet" on the Watchtower 2003 CD-ROM (containing *The Watchtower*) since 1950 plus most other publications, revealed that the expression came up 44 times. Every single occurrence was referring to a Bible writer.

## Links

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I would like to acknowledge the help I have received from the following three websites. These sites contain a wealth of information and are much more comprehensive than this relatively modest offering!

- **In Defense of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures**  
(mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/newworldtranslation/pageindex.htm)
- **How Theology and Bias Affects Bible Translation**  
(web.archive.org/web/20031220035352/http://hector3000.future.easyspace.com) (now sadly defunct, but available on an archive site)

- **Jehovah's Witnesses United - Biblical Exegesis Section** ([www.jehovah.to/exe](http://www.jehovah.to/exe))

Other sites you may find interesting:

- **Scriptural Truths** ([www.scripturaltruths.com](http://www.scripturaltruths.com)) - Contains well-documented information on the translation of many Bible texts, particularly those concerning the identity of Jesus Christ and his relationship with his father.
- **Jessica Carter's Weblog** ([jessicacarter.blogspot.com](http://jessicacarter.blogspot.com)) - With commentaries on the debate between Jason Beduhn and Rob Bowman on the correct translation of John 8:58.

Note that I am not affiliated with the above sites, or with the official Watchtower ([www.watchtower.org](http://www.watchtower.org)) site.

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## Interesting Books

Needless to say, I have also benefited greatly from a number of published works that have helped me to compile this site, among others:

Jehovah's Witnesses Defended - An Answer to Scholars and Critics, Second Edition (Stafford)

The Role of Theology and Bias in Bible Translation (Furuli)

"Your Word is Truth - Essays in Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures (1950, 1953)

Truth in Translation: Accuracy and Bias in English Translations of the New Testament (Beduhn)

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## Software

My favourite Bible program is e-sword ([www.e-sword.net](http://www.e-sword.net)). It has literally dozens of Bible versions, as well as the original Greek and Hebrew texts, Strong's and Thayer's dictionaries.