

The Way of Wisdom:

Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon

(A New Translation of the Latin Old Testament)

English Version:

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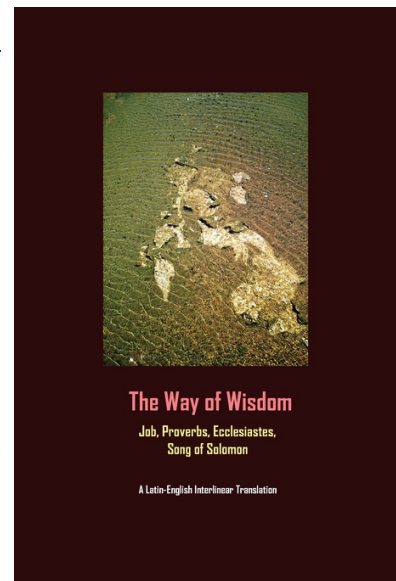
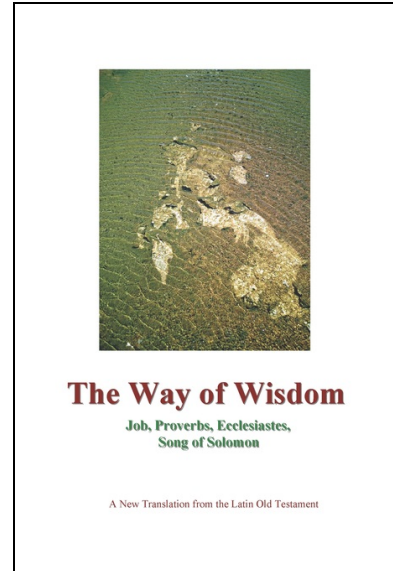
Book Description

Tired of *Christianity Lite*?

In a hard world, we need real answers. **The Way of Wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon** is a fresh translation of the Bible's Wisdom books, the deepest truth there is. Long before TV, psychologists or the internet, God's Word spoke to the deepest longings of our heart. God showed us how to succeed in life.

The Way of Wisdom has nothing to do with fads or theories. There is nothing "pop" about it. Instead, God shows us through it who we are, what life is about, and how we can live it well.

These four works from **The Bible – Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon** – offer us better advice than any other source could ever hope to. **Job** shows us what a human being is and where our comfort comes from. **Proverbs** teaches us how to succeed, whatever our path may be. **Ecclesiastes** teaches us what lasts and what doesn't. **The Song of Solomon** shows us what true love is all about.



Copies of the Book

are available at all major online retailers,
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FAQs

Who: John Cunyus, an ordained Disciples of Christ minister, is translating the Old Testament from *Biblia Sacra Iuxta Vulgatam Versionem*, The Vulgate, the Latin-language Bible, into contemporary English. John, a graduate of Rice, Texas Christian, and Pacific Western Universities, is the author of several books. He publishes the website, www.JohnCunyus.com, and a blog, “Rolling the Wheel.”

What: The Way of Wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon is a translation of the wisdom literature from the Bible, shared in common by Jews, Protestants, Catholics, and Orthodox.

When: Saint Jerome translated the Bible into Latin from the original languages, Hebrew and Greek, between 382 and 405 of the Common Era.

Where: Jerome’s translation, done in Jerusalem, became The Bible of Western Christianity for over 1,000 years.

Why: *ad maiorem dei gloriam*.
“To the greater glory of God.”

How to Use The Material

Groups/Classes: One approach for groups using the material is to read the books aloud, several chapters at a time, over a period of several sessions. This allows those present to hear them the way Jesus and his contemporaries would have, orally and in their entirety. Classes would include informal sharing, an opening prayer, twenty to thirty minutes of reading, then discussion. The class could then close with a prayer.

Comments So Far

“What really pleases me as I read your translation is the way you have set it up and the beautiful way in which you have caught the essence of each verse with elegant English (simple and understandable).”

– **Rev. Dr. Robert Gartman, Retired Minister, Dallas, Texas.**

“I welcome the translation of the Vulgate and the emphasis on Wisdom Literature. The Latin language and particularly the Vulgate have had an enormous impact on the Christian Church and our liturgical and theological formation. Be assured that I will forward the second copy to the Holy Father.”

– **Daniel Cardinal DiNardo, Archbishop of Galveston-Houston**

As I've said before, you've always been the consummate scholar and an incredibly rich thinker. The books that you're authoring are welcomed additions to the ongoing world of biblical studies – thanks for using your considerable gifts and talents to continue pointing people toward a fuller understanding of God's Eternal Word!

– **Major Stephen George, Chaplain, US Army, Afghanistan**

John visited our church as part of a book signing tour. He met with our adult Sunday school classes to explain why someone should be translating the Bible from the Vulgate. I was wondering that myself. His reasons are compelling. His translations are fresh and lacking the characteristic “stained glass voice” one often finds in reading the scriptures. I encourage John’s materials for study and devotional use, and commend him as an interesting and compelling speaker.

**Rev. Steven C. Digby
Minister, Odessa, Texas**

I want to express my gratitude for this translation. My wife Alicia brought it home in October, but we were in the midst of moving to the Metroplex. As 'fate' would have it, my daily Bible reading took me into Proverbs this January. Reading it in English had been difficult for me, because my mind seemed to wander. But when I picked up this interlinear translation, it was breathtaking!

My Latin is not very good, but somehow reading a familiar text in an unfamiliar tongue uses a part of my mind that wasn't engaged previously. Particularly since some of the Latin words are such close cognates to English---yet just different enough that I have to think about what the Latin is really communicating.

It sounds odd, but this book is helping me engage scripture because it takes what was once familiar and turns it into something strange---yet comprehensible. And I am grateful.

– **Joseph Harker**
Minister, Richardson, Texas

Teaching Ministry

John serves **Central Christian Church of Dallas** as “Minister at large.” After helping with Central’s Wednesday programming, he spends Sundays traveling to other churches.

He is tasked to “provide resources and encouragement to help revitalize adult education, specifically Sunday School.”

John’s policy is “any church, any Sunday, whether they can pay or not.” To arrange a program, please contact John at

John@JohnCunyus.com

See **www.JohnCunyus.com/wayofwisdomlatin.html**
Available at all major online booksellers.

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Learner's Guide
The Way of Wisdom:
Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

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Outline of Program One

Opening Prayer

Introduction of the Translation Project.

What the project is. Who I am. How this project got started.

See <http://www.johncunyus.com/files/WoWPublicity.pdf>

Brief description of the book/s:

Consensus Wisdom Literature from what my religious community calls the **Old Testament**.

Four major religious groups have a version of what we call the Old Testament:

1) Jews; 2) Orthodox Christians; 3) Catholics; and 4) Protestants.

Orthodox and Catholics have more wisdom books in their Old Testament than Protestants and Jews.

These four books – Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, are the consensus books, the books all four consider canonical.

Job – why do bad things happen to good people? Where is God in this?

Proverbs – how to succeed, whatever the endeavor.

Ecclesiastes – what lasts and what doesn't.

Song of Solomon – what does true love look like?

Dates of Composition

As Facebook would put it, "It's complicated."

Job – internal evidence suggests when the story took place. When it was actually written is more difficult to discern. Couldn't have been later than the Septuagint translations.

Internal aspects pointing to date of story setting, if not composition:

1) Omissions: temple, Jew, Israel, centralized worship, Jerusalem, Kings of Israel and Judah.

2) Semi-nomadic way of life; similar to the way Abraham is described as living. Predates Israel's entry into Canaan.

3) Interior of Near East, fertile crescent locations: Yemen; Northwest Arabia, near present day Eilat; present day Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia. These places remain well-known to us today, obviously.

Dialogue format may suggest a later date: format made famous by Plato, 5th Century BCE; standard form of philosophical discourse among the Greeks.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon – unlikely to have been earlier than Solomon's era; could not have been later than Septuagint translation, 3rd Century BCE.

How does a book come to be considered canonical?

How long does it take for a book to be accepted as canonical? Paul's letters as

examples: between date of composition and 100 years, depending on the source.
Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon written sometime between 1000 and 300 BCE.

Authors

Job – unknown.

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon – traditionally, Solomon.

Many modern scholars disagree with the tradition.

Whether he was or not, his life story helps us understand what wisdom is.

Solomon's life as backdrop to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon.

David and Bathsheba as parents.

Amnon rapes Tamar.

Absalom kills Amnon.

Absalom's exile, restoration, rebellion, and death.

David's failures as “home front” ruler and as father

The perils of royal succession in ancient societies.

Cases in point: Solomon's brother, Adonijah, and his uncle, Joab.

Wisdom tradition grows out of the age-old human desire to make things easier for our children. Solomon gave this impulse a literary boost, if nothing else. In Israel's wisest king, a deep, questioning trust in God deepened the already existing spring of the Wisdom tradition.

In some views, God is the author, having inspired writers to say exactly what God needed them to say.

Original language and transmission

Hebrew

Copied by hand.

Scholars were conscious of the perils of manuscript transmission by at least the 3rd Century CE.

Books could be lost or destroyed.

Books could be miscopied.

In the 3rd Century CE, **the great Christian scholar Origen**, created the *Hexapla*.

Six column, carefully compared and written version of scripture, as Origen knew it, in a variety of languages: Hebrew, Greek, phonetic Hebrew in Greek characters, among them.

Hexapla was eventually lost, as were many other ancient texts (including all the “autograph” manuscripts of the Bible.).

Jerome used it as starting point for much of his work.

Translations

Septuagint, 3rd Century BCE.

Hebrew and Aramaic into **Greek**, commissioned by one of the Ptolemies in Egypt; executed by rabbis in Alexandria, Egypt.

Vulgate, late 4th Century, CE.

Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek into **Latin**.

Who was Jerome?

What is “The Vulgate”?

See www.JohnCunyus.com/vulgatetranslations.html

Vulgate, from “vulgar”, or “common” Latin, as opposed to literary Latin. Jerome translated the Bible into the common language of his day.

Why Work from the Latin text?

I don’t mean to denigrate in the least the power of the work in the original languages! **Much Protestant hostility toward the Latin text;** residual, left over from the Reformation; perhaps we have thrown part of the baby out with the bath-water.

Douay Rheims Bible (New Testament, 1582; Old Testament, 1609-1610), for English-speaking Catholics.

Authorized, “King James,” Version (1611), for English-speaking Protestants.

There are some reasons for studying the Vulgate, as well.

Textual Reasons:

The Vulgate is an ancient textual tradition, rigorously translated, studiously compared and updated.

“Different” does not mean “worse.”

Jerome worked in the Late Roman era.

Prior to Rome’s fall, Muslim conquests, Crusades, and other upheavals.

He had access to texts and traditions that have been lost, like Origen’s *Hexapla*.

Oldest extant Bible, containing all the books in our Bibles (with a few extras) **is in Latin.**

Codex Amiatinus, 7th Century CE, vs *Codex Aleppo*, 10th Century CE.

Historical Reasons:

The Bible in Latin shaped Western Christianity more than any other version.

Theological Reasons

Makes some things clearer: Christological emphasis of the Book of Psalms, for instance.

Question: which version of the Word is the “real” Word?

Principles of Translation

Accuracy

Words must be translated according to commonly-accepted definitions; no esoteric translations.

Readability

Those words need to be intelligible to contemporary readers; avoid “stained-glass language,” meaningful to some, but incomprehensible to most.

Example: see “Word List.”

Am I “making up my own Bible?”

Some have expressed concerns that I might be “making up my own Bible.’

I make every effort to avoid that, using the following guidelines.

I use **Alexander Campbell's "fair, stipulated, and well-established" rule:**

The words of the Bible contain all the ideas in it. These words, then, rightly understood, and the ideas are clearly perceived. The words and sentences of the Bible are to be translated, interpreted, and understood according to the same code of laws and principles of interpretation by which other ancient writings are translated and understood; for, when God spoke to man in his own language, he spoke as one person converses with another – in the fair, stipulated, and well-established meaning of the terms.¹

I translate with **dictionary in hand.**

I check my translation using the **1899 Douay-Rheims** translation of the Vulgate, which was officially authorized by the Roman Catholic Church.

I add **footnotes clarifying persons and events** cited in the biblical text, where possible.

I add **footnotes containing wording from the Revised Standard Version**, where the Latin translation is difficult to understand.

Is This a "Literal" Translation

Several issues to speak to in answering:

Punctuation: Latin, Greek, and Hebrew lacked it during the ancient era; must be added by a modern translator to make sense of the text for a modern reader.

Spacing between words: lacking in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew texts of the ancient era; must be added to make sense.

Lack of certain words: often, "to be" verbs; articles (definite and indefinite) in Latin; all must be added to make sense.

Lack of vowels: unpointed Hebrew original. Must be added to make sense of the original.

Example: consonant string: **b t t r**

How "literal" do you want it? Do you mind if I use vowels?

I have followed the King James Version in italicizing words in the English translation that are not present in the Latin text.

Why New Translations?

"You know, they've been translated already."

Originals don't change, but our language does.

Meaning of words in modern languages changes: "suffer," "prevent," and "gay."

Shades of meaning of words found in the ancient texts:

Example from The Lord's Prayer: give us this day our daily bread:

Matthew 6:11 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον

¹ Alexander Campbell, The Christian System in Reference to the UNION OF CHRISTIANS and a Restoration of PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANITY as Plead in the Current Reformation, Fourth Edition, Ayer Company Publishers, Salem, New Hampshire, Reprint Edition, 1988, pg 15.

Luke 11: 3 τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δίδου ἡμῖν τὸ καθ' ἡμέραν
ἐπιούσιον appears twice in Greek New Testament.

Jerome translates ἐπιούσιον with two different words:

Matthew 6:11: *supersubstantialem*

Luke 11:3: *cotidie*

This gives us the range of meanings of the word, in the understanding of a late 4th Century CE scholar.

Why the Wisdom books?

These books will never be the favored scriptures of those who consistently win.

These books become priceless for those who know about loss, pain, grief, and unfairness.

Outline of Program Two

Opening Prayer

Key Words

Discuss each word; find contexts; explore understandings;
consider how word applies to the present.

aeternum – eternity, without beginning or end. Compare to *sempiternum*, everlasting, lasting forever.

Deus – God; translates Hebrew words *El* and, more frequently, *Elohim*, meaning “God.” *Elohim* is the plural of *El*, yet is most often translated as the singular, God. Christian Tradition understands the plural as an acknowledgment of God’s Triune nature.

Dominus – the Lord; substituted for formal, Hebrew given name; God’s proper name, Y-H-W-H, was considered too holy to speak aloud by the time the Septuagint was translated.

homo – man, human being, humanity, an individual man. When used generically, is understood to include *mulier*, woman.

impius – lawless; those with an insufficient reverence for God or gods. Compare to *iustus* (see below.)

infernus – “below”; destination of all who die, in Book of Job.

iniquitas – treachery, betrayal, iniquity, wickedness.

insipiens – empty-headed, fool; a stupid person.

iustitia – fairness, justice. Combined with *miseriordia* (see below) as fundamental attributes of God in relationship to human affairs.

iustus – fair, just, law-abiding; merciful and fair.

malum – disaster, misfortune, calamity, harm, evil.

miseriordia – mercy.

parabola – comparison.

rectus – right, upright, unashamed, not guilty.

saeculum – time, age, generation, people born during one period of time. Often appears as *saeculum saeculi*, “age of age,” or, more frequently, “age of ages.”

sapiens – wise, understanding.

sapientia – wisdom.

Satanas – Satan, adversary, accuser, in Book of Job.

simplex – simple, straightforward, truthful, honest.

stultus – fool; someone who is unteachable; stubbornly ignorant, despite obvious lessons.

vanitas – pointlessness, vanity; action that serves no lasting purpose.

Outline of Program Three

Opening Prayer
Readings from Job
Discussion
Closing Prayer

Outline of Program Four

Opening Prayer
Readings from Proverbs
Discussion
Closing Prayer

Outline of Program Five

Opening Prayer
Readings from Ecclesiastes
Discussion
Closing Prayer

Outline of Program Six

Opening Prayer
Readings from Song of Solomon
Discussion
Closing Prayer

How Did This Translation Come About?

I spent twenty years as a Protestant minister, serving congregations in Texas. When that ended in July, 2005, I was so hurt and so angry I almost lost my faith entirely. I felt cut off, abandoned, cast out by the church. During that period, I passed *“through waterless places seeking rest; and finding none,”* as Jesus said in Luke 11:24.

Looking back, I suppose there were only two reasons I didn't give up on faith and church entirely. My Sunday School class, the Sojourners at Central Christian Church in Dallas, was so relentlessly accepting and loving toward me that I couldn't let them go. My dear friend since college, Myles Hall, wouldn't let me let go of the Christian commitments I'd had since childhood. I can't say I appreciated either of them for it at the time.

In late 2007, still struggling to hold on, I began writing a book on Buddhism. Buddha's words kept reminding me of Ecclesiastes, a difficult little book from what Christians call “The Old Testament.” As I worked, I thought to myself (often sarcastically), What would Christian faith look like if it started with Ecclesiastes, instead of Genesis?

When I finished [A Path Beyond Suffering: Working the Buddhist Method](#), I felt compelled to find out. I began working my way laboriously through the Latin version of Ecclesiastes. I chose the Latin, in part, because I hadn't studied Hebrew since seminary in the mid 1980s. I considered working through it in Greek, as I often had done with New Testament texts. But I wanted the fresh perspective of a language that was new, to me at least.

As I translated, I felt an increasingly heavy

burden on my heart. I would have said, during my former life as a minister, that God was calling me back to Himself. But I didn't want to go back. I was still angry. I had come to see so much of Protestant church life as self-centered, a cult of personality around pastors and buildings, bearing little resemblance to the biblical faith.

Yet a contrarian little voice in my head was insisting ever more loudly that, yes, one's faith could begin with Ecclesiastes.

A turning point in my journey came when my interest in Latin led me to a Latin-language Tridentine Mass at St. Thomas Aquinas Church, the parish in my neighborhood. I'd known about the service for years and told myself for years that one day I would attend. I hadn't, because they insisted on holding it at 6:30 in the mornings!

One night, in the midst of translating Ecclesiastes, with family out of the country visiting other family, I told myself I would go the following morning, if I woke up in time. I woke up early, tried to roll back over and go back to sleep, and found I couldn't. Lying there, I said to myself, ‘Well, I can stay in bed, or I can take a shower and go to church.’

I grumbled, got out of bed and went to church. I understood perhaps four words of the entire liturgy. The priest, as is customary in the Latin rite, said the service facing away from the congregation, toward the altar and crucifix. Yet one thought hit me like Job's tornado: this service wasn't about the worshipers! The service wasn't about the priest, the congregation, the preaching, or anything else. It was about God. That realization rushed over me like a flood. I found myself praying, pouring out my heart to

God, as I hadn't been able to in years. I experienced peace, a rootedness in God, that I had sorely missed during my time in the *waterless places, seeking rest and finding none*.

I have been working on translations of the Latin Old Testament since. Whether they ever touch anyone else, they have already touched my heart beyond description.

John Cunyus
August 10, 2008

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