

A recent publication attempts to popularize Scripture

# Pop goes the Bible

by Ted Giese

*Bible Illuminated The Book, New Testament*, a modern take on medieval manuscripts, uses slick photos in a glossy fashion-magazine format to put across its new take on the New Testament.

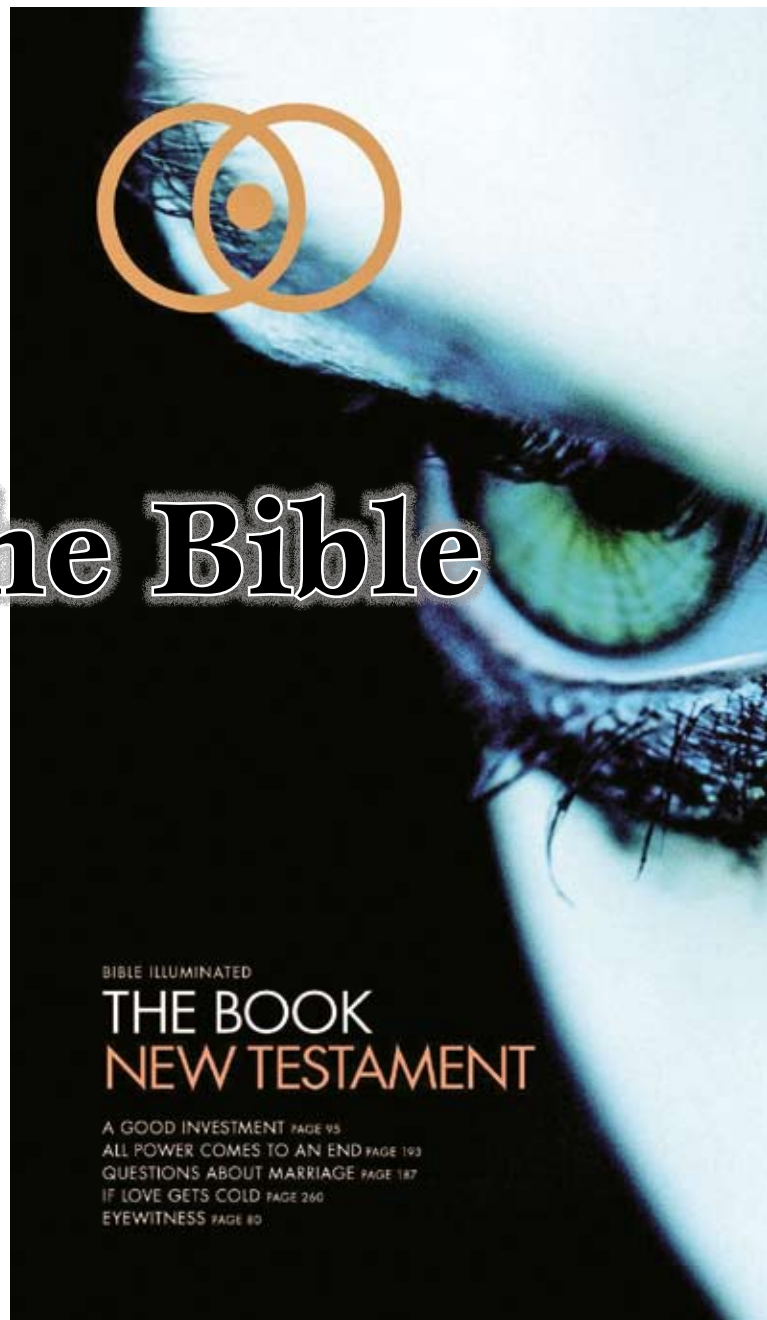
The hand-lettered, elaborately gilded Bibles of the past used imagery of the day—knights, soldiers, and weapons such as siege machinery—to illustrate the conquests of Joshua or David, for instance. Similarly, *Illuminated's* creator Dag Söderberg says, he uses contemporary portraits and photography “to make the Bible accessible and readable.”

In a promotional video posted on YouTube, Söderberg—who describes himself as a “spiritual but not particularly religious individual”—provides the publisher’s philosophy: “We’re illuminating the Bible so it makes sense.”

The question is: For a modern Lutheran, does *Bible Illuminated* make sense?

This is not a new translation. It’s the American Bible Society’s Good News Translation (GNT)/Today’s English Version (1992, second edition), which is considered by most scholars a poor translation of Scripture, in part due to its use of the “dynamic equivalence” approach. This method of translation doesn’t emphasize exactness and can obscure the original text.

For example, compare two versions of 1 Peter 1:18-19. In the English Standard Version we read: “...knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ.” GNT puts it this way: “For you know what was paid to set you free from the worthless manner of life handed down by your ancestors. It was not something that can be destroyed, such as silver or gold; it was the costly sacrifice of Christ.”



This may not seem like a big deal—but replacing the “blood of Christ” with “costly sacrifice of Christ” potentially takes us away from the reality of the Cross to an abstract, subjective idea of “sacrifice.” Hundreds of such examples of passages being simplified or sanitized can be found in the GNT. While many Lutheran congregations might have this edition kicking around their Sunday schools, its presence in a Lutheran church doesn’t make it a better translation. Adding photographs also doesn’t change the translation for the better.

Söderberg is proud of the powerful photographs used in *Bible Illuminated*. Sometimes they can be effective; unfortunately, being “spiritual but not religious” seems to have created a situation in which Söderberg disregards



the faith of most Christians. One striking example comes in his photographic interpretation of Mark 1:2 (GNT): “God said, ‘I will send my messenger ahead of you to open the way for you.’”

To illustrate the passage, Söderberg compiled a series of full-page photos of individuals: Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, Jr., Angelina Jolie, Mahatma Gandhi, U2’s Bono, and Mother Teresa. These photos strongly suggest Söderberg believes them to be messengers of God who, like John the Baptist, are opening the way for Jesus.

While Gandhi had respect for the Jesus’ teachings, Gandhi was a Hindu and not a Christian; to have been a messenger of God, like Isaiah or John the Baptist, Gandhi would have had to put his trust in Jesus and confess Jesus as his Lord and Saviour, and this is not the case. What Söderberg presents is religious pluralism—a popular inclusive belief asserting that all peoples, in all spiritual practices, worship God and will enter heaven by being faithful to their spirituality. This contradicts the words of our Lord Jesus when He says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (John 14:6 ESV). *Bible Illuminated* is filled with such photographic commentaries on Scripture.

Would this be a good Bible to pick up for a teenager? When I showed it to the teens in my confirmation class, one said: “They need to get *older* pictures.” Young people are media-savvy and sophisticated

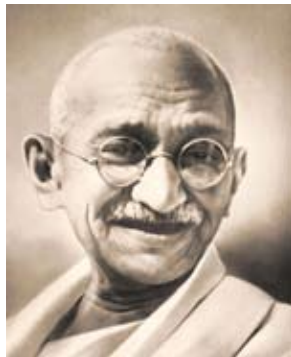
in their reading of the world of advertising. *Bible Illuminated* may look cool today but it will be dated tomorrow. If you’re looking for a Bible to give, or to pick up a new Bible for yourself, this may not be the best long-term devotional Bible. That being said, many people have



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come to Christ reading the Good News Bible, even with its translation faults, and it’s comforting to know that the Holy Spirit is exceedingly more powerful than even the poorest translation of Scripture.

As Lutherans we endeavour, with our teaching and preaching, to succeed in the task of “illuminating the Bible so it makes sense.” Unfortunately, *Bible Illuminated* actually has the opposite overall effect by injecting, with photographs, subjectivity and worldly opinions into timeless truth.

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