

Louis Dorn (1928–2020)

The Bible Translator
2021, Vol. 72(2) 268–270
© The Author(s) 2021
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/20516770211033834
journals.sagepub.com/home/tbt


I first met Louie at the 1991 UBS Triennial Translation Workshop in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. There I saw his passion for the UBS English Handbook Series as its editor. I volunteered to review the one on Genesis, and thus began a long relationship, during which I eventually took over as editor. He was well organized and meticulous in all he did, and able to concentrate intensely on his work with an excellent eye for detail. As a gentle and kind man he graciously corrected the work of the Handbook authors, interacting with them face-to-face at workshops whenever possible. He worked long days, since it took over an hour one way to travel by bus and subway from his home in New Jersey to the UBS office in New York City. He was always learning, trying to improve the Handbooks, even in the area of font type and size for readability. He had a good relationship with the staff of the American Bible Society, where his office was located, knowing most of them by name.

That describes a little of his work life, but what really impressed me about Louie was his relationship with his wife Erna. When they walked together at a workshop, they usually held hands. In their home it was evident they had a great love and respect for each other. They were excellent hosts, both serving together. They spoke highly of their four children and seven grandchildren, some of whom I only met briefly.

Louie also displayed a deep walk with God. He wanted the Handbooks to be as accurate and error-free as possible for the glory of God. He often preached on Sundays in the local churches of his denomination. He was not afraid to challenge his denomination to associate more with other believers to show our unity in Christ. He treated everyone respectfully as people made in the image of God.

As I took over the reins from Louie, I noticed two principles he held dearly in his work. First, he wanted the Handbooks to be accessible to all Bible translators, those highly educated and those with little formal education, those who spoke English as their mother tongue and those who used it as a second language. He aimed for a language level of a ninth-grade student. At times this frustrated authors who were used to writing for

scholarly journals. The grammar could not be complex (for example, long sentences and passive structures). Footnotes were discouraged and only a limited bibliography was allowed. He stressed that the material be readable and relevant, dealing with the pertinent exegetical, textual, and translational issues. If a particular problem had two or more possible solutions, he asked the authors to give their preferred solution whenever possible since many translators have limited resources to deal with these issues on their own. He also asked authors to use limited Greek and Hebrew, and then only in transliterated form, which irritated some. When Louie assigned a Handbook, he first gave the author a booklet entitled "Content, Style, and Format," which outlines these guidelines for the Handbooks. He learned the importance of them from his work with translators in the Philippines (1953–1974) before he became the editor.

Second, he never put his name as editor on any Handbook he labored over. He felt strongly that only the authors' names should be given, with ultimate credit going to God. When others pressed him to add his name, he resisted. Soon after I became the editor, I was asked to add all the names of the past editors, including Louie's. He certainly should be recognized for all the time he spent on each Handbook. He appointed the authors and gave them directions and encouragement as they wrote. After the final draft from the authors, he spent hours editing the text and giving suggestions on how to improve it. He formatted it for printing, and had it printed and copyrighted. He kept a record of errors in the final printed copy and used a light table to make minor corrections before a reprint. He did a lot behind the scenes to make the Handbooks available to translators worldwide. I'm thankful these books are readily available now to every translator via Paratext.

Louie was appointed editor of the Handbooks in 1978 by Eugene Nida, after he had completed his doctorate in Old Testament studies at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago (1974–1978). Here is a list of the Handbooks Louie edited from 1978 to 2001: Amos (1979), John (1980), 1 Peter (1980), Ephesians (1982), Joshua (1983), Hebrews (1983), 1 Corinthians (1985 and 1994), Matthew (1988), Nahum/Habakkuk/Zephaniah (1989), Leviticus (1990), Psalms (1991), Ruth (1992, 2nd edition), Job (1992), Lamentations (1992), Revelation (1993), 2 Peter/Jude (1993), Obadiah/Jonan/Micah (1978, 1982, 1993), 2 Corinthians (1993), Daniel (1994), 1 Corinthians (1985, 1994), 1–2 Timothy/Titus (1995), James (1997), Esther (1997), Genesis (1998), Ecclesiastes (1998), Song of Songs (1998), Exodus (1999), Deuteronomy (2000), and 1–2 Samuel (2001). He also edited several Guides for Translators from 1981 to 1984 when they were discontinued (Pentateuch, Psalms, Matthew, Mark, Luke, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Pastoral Epistles, James/1–2 Peter/Jude, and Revelation). He edited some of the UBS Technical Helps

for Translators and some of the UBS Monographs. He also oversaw the Handbook work in other major languages: Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian, and Indonesian. The capstone for his career was co-authoring the Handbook on Hosea, which was published shortly after his death.

Many translators around the world have expressed their appreciation for the Handbooks. A couple of years before Louie's death, he shared with his son Martin a personal highlight for himself. Eugene Nida once said to him, "Louis, hiring you was the best decision I made in my entire career." A great compliment from a master of Bible translation.¹ Praise God for this good and faithful servant.

Donald J. Slager
Editor, UBS Handbooks
United Bible Societies

¹ I am grateful to Margie Dorn White and Martin Dorn, two of Louie's children, for providing some of the details of Louie's life, including this anecdote.