Why do we read “Matthew,” “John,” or “Luke” in our Bibles if those names didn’t exist in the time of Christ? This question, often raised in discussions about the authenticity of the Bible, has been used by critics to suggest that Scripture has been modified or falsified. However, far from threatening the integrity of the Word, this linguistic reality — *transliteration* — is a gateway to understanding the richness of Tradition, the transmission of the Scriptures, and the Church’s enduring reverence for divine truth.

In this article, we will explore why seemingly “modern” names appear in the Bible, what transliteration really means, and how this does not contradict the fidelity of Scripture but rather confirms its deepest essence. Furthermore, we will see how this understanding can strengthen our faith and help us live the Word of God more consciously in our daily lives.

I. What is transliteration?

Transliteration is the process by which words or names from one language are adapted into another, not by translating their meaning but by transferring the sounds of the letters into a different alphabetic system. For example:

- יוחנן (*Yôḥānān*) in Hebrew → Ἰωάννης (*Iōánnēs*) in Greek → *Ioannes* in Latin → *John* in English.
- מַתִּתְיָהוּ (*Mattityahu*) in Hebrew → Ματθαῖος (*Matthaíos*) in Greek → *Matthaeus* in Latin → *Matthew* in English.

Each time the Bible is transmitted into a new language, the names are also phonetically adapted so they can be understood and pronounced by speakers of that language. This does not alter the theological content of the text but makes it easier to read and comprehend.

> ***Transliteration does not change the message, but makes it accessible.*** *Just as we translate “bread” as “pan” in Spanish, we also call Iēsous “Jesus” so we can pronounce His name and relate to Him.*

II. A History of Biblical Transmission: From Jerusalem to the World

The Bible did not fall from the sky in English, Spanish, or French. It was written in ancient languages: Hebrew, Aramaic, and Koine Greek. Over the centuries, the Word of God was translated and carefully copied, first into Greek (the Septuagint or LXX), then into Latin (the **Vulgate** by St. Jerome), and later into all vernacular languages.

During this process, biblical names went through different phases of transliteration:

- **Ancient Hebrew**: the original names, such as *Yeshua*, *Moshe*, *Shaul*, *Yohanan*.
- **Koine Greek**: the apostles and evangelists wrote or circulated texts in Greek, which lacked certain Hebrew letters, so the names were adapted: *Yeshua* → *Iēsous*, *Moshe* → *Mōÿsēs*.
- **Latin**: the liturgical and academic language of Christianity for centuries adapted the names further: *Iēsous* → *Iesus*, *Iōánnēs* → *Ioannes*, *Petros* → *Petrus*.
- **Modern languages**: each language borrowed from Latin (or directly from Greek) its own forms: *John*, *Peter*, *Luke*, *Matthew* in English.

> *There is no heresy in calling Yeshua “Jesus.” The Church has always recognized the validity and sacredness of these names in every language.*

III. Is This Proof the Bible Has Been Falsified?

Some movements, especially certain sects and groups that promote an exclusive return to the original Hebrew, claim that the use of “modern” names like “Jesus” or “John” proves that the Bible has been altered or “Romanized.”

This is a misunderstanding of both linguistics and theology.
To claim that the Bible is falsified because names have been transliterated is like saying the

Gospel is no longer valid because we say "Father" instead of "Abba." The content and essence remain intact.

The Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, has zealously preserved the doctrinal fidelity of Scripture, as the Second Vatican Council reminds us in *Dei Verbum*:

> *"The books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation" (DV 11).*

The form of the names changes depending on the language, but **the person they refer to is the same**, and the theological content remains unchanged. Whether we call Jesus *Yeshua*, *Iesus*, *Jesus*, *Jésus*, or *Gesù*, we are referring to the same Son of God incarnate, "the same yesterday, today, and forever" (Heb 13:8).

IV. Examples of Transliteration Within the Bible Itself

The Bible itself shows multiple versions of names depending on the language or context:

- In the Old Testament, the name Moses is *Moshe* in Hebrew, but Greek authors write it as *Mōÿsēs*.
- *Saul* becomes *Paul* after his conversion, a Latin name likely adopted during his missionary journeys.
- *Simon* is also called *Peter*, a name Christ Himself gives him (Jn 1:42): "You are Simon, son of John; you shall be called Cephas (which means Peter)."

> *Even within the Bible, there are translations and adaptations. This does not weaken the text—it enriches it.*

V. Theological Relevance: Why Does This Matter for My Faith?

1. **It connects us to the living Tradition**: By understanding that the names in the Bible have been transmitted through the centuries and adapted to each language and culture, we recognize the living work of the Holy Spirit in the Church. As the Catechism teaches: “Thanks to the assistance of the Holy Spirit, the understanding of both the realities and the words of the heritage of faith is able to grow in the life of the Church” (CCC 94).
2. **It protects us from literalist fundamentalism**: Some sects reject names like “Jesus” because they are not Hebrew. But this is a form of legalism that forgets God has revealed Himself to all nations and in all languages. Let us remember that at Pentecost, the apostles spoke **in every language** (Acts 2:4–11).
3. **It encourages us to love Scripture in our own language**: Saying “Jesus” is no less sacred than saying *Yeshua*. God is not offended by the language we use but by the hardness of our hearts. What matters is that we invoke His Name with faith and reverence.

VI. Practical Applications: How to Live This Truth Today

- **Value the Bible in your language**: You don’t need to learn Hebrew to encounter Christ. God speaks to you in your own language, your own history, your own heart.
- **Avoid unnecessary scandals**: If someone tells you the Bible has been altered because it uses “modern” names, respond with charity and knowledge. Explain the difference between translation, transliteration, and falsification.
- **Deepen your understanding of Scripture**: Look up the original meanings of biblical names. For example, “Matthew” (*Matityahu*) means “gift of God”; “John” (*Yohanan*) means “God is merciful.”
- **Pray with the Name of the Lord**: It doesn’t matter if you say *Iēsous*, *Jesus*, or *Yesu* (in Swahili). What matters is that you invoke His Name with love and faith, as St. Paul says: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” (Rom 10:13).

VII. Conclusion: The Word of God, Eternal in All Languages

The presence of names like “Matthew,” “Luke,” or “John” in our Bibles is not evidence of corruption, but a sign of God’s love in wanting His Word to reach every corner of the earth. Transliteration is a bridge, not a barrier. It is the path through which God continues to speak to us—in our language, in our culture, in our story.

Scripture, translated and adapted into the languages of all peoples, is living and effective (cf. Heb 4:12), and its Truth endures forever.

> *“Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away” (Mt 24:35).*

Let us not be scandalized by the modern appearance of names, but rather discover, beyond the letters, the eternal voice of God who calls us by name… in our language… and in our hearts.

Want to go deeper? Look for a Bible with philological notes or consult the Vulgate and interlinear texts. But above all, **open your Bible and let God speak to you**… even if it says “Matthew” and not *Matityahu*, **it is still the Word of God.**