



**Banks, Mel, Jr.**

*Soul Infinity New Testament.*

Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2009. Pp. xxi + 373. Paper. \$12.99.  
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Let me begin this review by outlining the distinct features of this particular Bible:

- **Book Introductions** — Very short remarks on some key features of each book.
- **The Point** — The publisher describes these as looking at “*really important ideas that you’ve just got to understand.*” (p. A7)
- **Power Choices** — These outline seemingly difficult choices and offer advice on how to “*do things God’s way.*” (p. A7)
- **Keeping You Swagger Strong** — “*This feature highlights biblical principles for success and leadership.*” (p. A8)
- **Prayer** — Self explanatory.
- **Flow** — The annotator’s idea of a “*fresh*” was to restate some great verses in the Bible.

Now allow me to quote the publisher’s blurb in full:

*Soul Infinity* is a New Testament that addresses the concerns and interests of urban youth. It features content that gives readers the tools to build a better life through God’s life-changing truths. This is the New Testament with soul for today’s urban culture. Urban Spirit! created the content for *Soul Infinity* to focus on the needs of urban America and those who grew up in church and in the hip-hop generation and who participate in the culture and enjoy its music, art, and style. The Urban Spirit! Editorial team includes editors and writers who have years of experience, expertise, and credentials in Christian education and curriculum design/publishing. They—like many members of the hip-hop renaissance—are determined to create only what is authentic!

Laura Bartlett shared with me that this NT was “*written to connect with a 16-34 year old audience that listens to Hip-Hop or R&B music.*” I certainly fit the target demographic and as someone who spent a good part of my youth writing, performing, and recording rap music while

pursuing a record deal I think I'm able to offer added insight into the authenticity of this Bible. Likewise, I have worked extensively with inner-city teens (mostly gang members) in the recent past in addition to having taught various Sunday school and Bible study classes for the youth at my church, so I'm well aware of what's going on with the urban youth of this generation. And it is from this perspective that I regret to inform my reading audience that this Bible does not live up to the hype offered in the publisher's blurb.

First of all, if the target audience is today's urban culture it's not entirely which sector of that culture is being appealed to from the publisher's blurb. The "power choice" in Matthew's Gospel begins by saying: "*Who do you roll with? Now that you're saved and all up in church, do you just hang with church folk?*" (11) The implication then is that it's church kids that this Bible is meant for, which is good and well, but then it should be marketed as such. In reading through the various "power choices" I've only come across things that would have relevance for church kids and not urban youth as a whole. There's nothing seriously addressing growing up without a father, teen pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, gang activity, or the plethora of other issues that urban teens and young adults face today. Like it or not, these are the "concerns" and "interests" of many of today's "urban youth."

Secondly (and this is my biggest problem), the language is horrendous, almost insulting. I remember when Sara Palin was running for vice president alongside of John McCain she was heavily criticized for trying to act too "folksy" and the incessant dropping of her Gs was something that really annoyed a lot of people... that's exactly how I feel when reading the notes in this NT. Gs are dropped; "because" is inconsistently rendered as "cause"; and there's an overabundance of terms that simply have no currency in today's slang. For example, the "power choice" in Mark says: "*So Jesus went around performing miracles as a way of lettin' people know he wasn't some fugazi.*" (50) Now I love the film *Donnie Brasco* as much as anyone, and it is from this film that anyone in the urban community ever decided to use "fugazi" in any kind of regular conversation, but this never caught on as a commonly used term so far as I'm aware. And in terms of "fugazi" being used in popular music I'm hard pressed to find anyone who employed the term with any frequency. Apart from a single use of the word by Jay-Z in his 1997 hit single "Imaginary Player" and another single use by Talib Kweli in the lesser known (but still quite good) song "Guerrilla Monsoon Rap" in 2002, I can't think of anyone who's really said it. But the notes are full of throwbacks like "*big ballers and shot callers*" (45) [think Lil' Troy, c. 1998] and "*bout it bout it*" (56) [think Master P., c. 1996]; et al.

I began to read a portion of the notes to a friend last night and he asked me to please stop. He honestly couldn't stand to listen to the way that things were worded. I'm sorry, but I have an extremely hard time believing that the editorial team is at all familiar with the way that kids these days talk. And even if kids did *talk* this way, there's no reason to *write* this way. This is what I mean when I say that it's almost insulting to read this kind of stuff. It's like the editors took the most stereotypical language from a decade ago that they could think of, added a bunch of "dudes" to it, and then decided to write the notes in such a style. I'm reminded of a recent episode of *Law & Order: SVU* entitled "Babes" in which they had a white guy who played a character named DJ Dizzer. The way he talked was just so far from the way that anyone actually speaks that it was ridiculous and Ice T's character Detective Tutuola noted as much. You can see what I'm talking about with reference to this stereotypical slang from the NBC abbreviated

replay<sup>1</sup> of the episode (the part in question appears with about 2:03 left). The sad thing is that any value that the notes have (and I admit that they do say some good things) is tainted by trying too hard to sound young and hip. More than anything kids appreciate when someone is being real with them (I'd imagine all people share this in common), so giving them a Bible that they can relate to doesn't have to involve trying to sound like what you think they might be used to hearing (the *Revolution for Teen Guys* Bibles from Zondervan are a good example of this).

And finally, let me close with an aesthetic gripe: this particular Bible is 9" wide by 6" high (a landscape layout) which isn't the best look and makes for an awkward feel in your hand. What's worse is that it comes in a 6" x 9" slip cover (a portrait layout) which is deceiving because it makes you think that the book will match the cover. I can't even begin to fathom how or why they thought this would be a good idea.

I really wanted to like this Bible and I was actually excited to receive it for review but regretfully I cannot recommend it to anyone as I feel it is a poor representation of the concerns of urban youth as a whole and I think the language fits a stereotypical mold that is far from an accurate depiction of the way things actually are. The one saving grace is that it comes in the New Living Translation and my love for this translation is well documented.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.nbc.com/Law\\_and\\_Order\\_Special\\_Victims\\_Unit/video/clips/babes-1110/825881/](http://www.nbc.com/Law_and_Order_Special_Victims_Unit/video/clips/babes-1110/825881/)