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PROTESTANT REFORMED
THEOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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USA

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Editor's Notes

The November 2011 issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal* is devoted to articles and book reviews that commemorate the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible. Included in this issue are the speeches that the faculty gave at the Seminary-sponsored celebration that was held the second week of October in the First Christian Reformed Church of Byron Center, Michigan.

Prior to the Seminary's celebration of this noteworthy anniversary, the faculty gave their speeches at the Officebearers' Conference of Classis West of the Protestant Reformed Churches. The conference was held at the Peace Protestant Reformed Church in Lansing, IL. It has been the custom of Classis West for many years to hold officebearers' conferences prior to the meeting of classis at least once a year. These conferences are planned by a special committee of the classis. The faculty is grateful to the conference committee for giving us the privilege to speak at their most recent conference.

In addition, in the first week of October the faculty gave their speeches at a conference held in the Protestant Reformed Church in Hull, IA. This conference was sponsored by the five Protestant Reformed churches in the area. The faculty spent the weekend in the area, with all the professors preaching twice on the Lord's Day. We heard many encouraging comments on the speeches, and many expressed appreciation for the faculty's visit to northwest Iowa.

The speeches presented at these three conferences are included in this issue of the *Journal*. In addition, we have included Rev. Doug Kuiper's introductory speech given at the officebearers' conference. A special thanks to him for submitting the manuscript of his speech.

Besides the articles that are devoted to the commemoration of the 400th anniversary of the KJV, the book reviews included in this issue are all reviews of books on the KJV.

Allow me to quote from the introduction to the article dealing with the history of the King James Version:

The Protestant Reformed Churches join those who are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Our celebration of the KJV's quatercentenary is a thankful

celebration; we are thankful to God. We celebrate the King James Bible because it is the version that these churches use in public worship, in the seminary, for family and personal devotions, in our schools, on the mission field, and at consistory meetings, classis, and synod, and so many other functions.

In that respect our celebration of the 400th anniversary of the KJV differs from so many other celebrations. There are many celebrations that have taken place, and some that will yet take place, at which the King James Bible is praised for its literary and historical value. The KJV and Shakespeare's plays are often regarded as the twin pillars of the 'golden age' of English literature. It is pointed out that they have done more to develop the English language than anything written after them. Together they added hundreds of words and expressions to the English language. Many fine things are said about the KJV. It is acclaimed as the 'noblest monument of English prose.' But these celebrations—not all of them, but many of them—are a bit like the building of the tombs of the prophets and the garnishing of the sepulchers of the righteous by the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus' day. For these are the same people who have jettisoned the KJV from their churches, who have harsh things to say about the practical usefulness of the KJV, and who years ago already have replaced the KJV with one or more of the modern versions.

The Protestant Reformed Churches and the Protestant Reformed Seminary celebrate the anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible because we are genuinely thankful to God for this Bible, because we use this Bible, and because we regard this Bible as the best translation of the Bible in the English language.

May you be blessed by this issue of the *Protestant Reformed Theological Journal*. If you use the KJV, may you be confirmed in your commitment to use this version of the Bible. If you have discarded the KJV in favor of another English version, these articles will give you an opportunity to reconsider this decision. And maybe, just maybe, if your church has discarded the KJV, you might be able to convince the elders to educate the people and bring the congregation back to the use of the KJV.

Soli Deo Gloria!

— RLC

God's Word Written: Where, How, and Why?

Douglas Kuiper

For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Romans 15:4

God communicates to His people by His word, His revelation of Himself.

Our words take different forms—spoken, written, signed. So does God's word. God gives His word to the church in spoken form (the prophets and apostles), written form (the Scriptures), and incarnate form (Christ in the flesh).

Apart from the form of the incarnate Word, the other forms are without substance. Christ's work of coming in our flesh was God speaking His Word to us: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:1, 14). In sending Christ into the flesh, God was not merely speaking *about* the nice things He would do for the church; rather, He was *actually doing* that which the church needed for her salvation.

This incarnate Word of God is the content and unifying factor of both God's spoken word and God's written word. That the *spoken* word has the incarnation as its content and unifying factor is clear from Romans 1:1-3: "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God, (Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures), concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh...." The gospel concerns Christ incarnate; accordingly, the

prophets spoke of Christ coming in the flesh. That the *written* word has the incarnation as its content and unifying factor is clear from John 5:39: “Search the scriptures,” Jesus said to the Jews, “for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and *they are they which testify of me*” (emphasis DJK).

We turn our attention now to the written form of God’s word, the Scriptures, and more particularly to the word of God as it has come down to English-speaking people for 400 years in the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible.

We distinguish between the KJV and the word of God. The Holy Scriptures are God’s word to His people. This saving word of God to His people comes to us in the form of translations and versions. Arguably the best translation of the Scriptures into the English language to date, the KJV as such is but one particular translation of the Scriptures for those who speak one particular language.

This distinction does not deny that the KJV conveys God’s word. If the KJV did not convey God’s word, it would be of no use to us, and the celebration of its anniversary would be pointless for the church. Because the KJV does convey God’s word, the celebration of its anniversary, with gratitude to God, is warranted.

Rather, this distinction between the KJV and the word of God underscores the fact that God’s word is broader than any one particular translation and version of the Scriptures. The KJV is one particular translation and version of the Scriptures, to people of one language (English), during one era of history (post-Reformation). By contrast, God’s word is for His people of every tongue, at every time in history.

Having made this distinction, let us see the relationship between the KJV and the word of God. Not only does the KJV convey God’s word, but the very wonder of God’s revelation of Himself in the Scriptures underlies the KJV, and makes it possible. Properly to celebrate the anniversary of the KJV, we marvel at the wonder work of God that underlies the KJV and all other faithful translations—the revelation of God to His people regarding our salvation, by means of His written word.

Where?

Without question, God's word is written in the Holy Scriptures, also known as the Bible.

The Holy Scriptures are those writings in which God has set forth all that His people need to know about Him in order to enjoy salvation and to glorify Him. These writings comprise the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. To these writings the apostle Paul refers in Romans 15:4, in the phrase "whatsoever things were written aforetime," and in the word "scriptures." He refers particularly to the Old Testament Scriptures, for the New Testament canon was not yet completed. But what the verse says particularly about the Old Testament Scriptures in Paul's day is certainly also true of the New Testament writings in our day.

The Holy Spirit works in the heart of the believing child of God to know that the Scriptures are God's word. Working this confidence in us, the Holy Spirit shows us that the Scriptures *claim* to be God's word. Some Scriptures, such as the law and the prophets, are the written version of what God Himself wrote or spoke. Other Scriptures, such as the Old Testament historical narratives and wisdom writings, and the gospels and epistles of the New Testament, are God's word through the pens of men. The two well-known passages that teach the inspiration of the Scriptures, II Timothy 3:16-17 and II Peter 1:21, which we will quote later, teach this. Second, the Spirit directs the believer's attention to the *content* of the Scriptures—from Genesis 1 to Revelation 22, they speak of God's will regarding our salvation and God's work to accomplish this salvation. Finally, the Spirit points the believer to the *prophecies* of the Scriptures, causing us along with "the very blind...to perceive that the things foretold in them are fulfilling" (Belgic Confession, Article 5).

The Scriptures *alone* are God's written word, to the exclusion of other books. Not only the book of Revelation, but the entire canon of Scripture closes with the admonition of Revelation 22:18-19: "For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book: And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away

his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.” These words are, as it were, God’s final “AMEN” on the whole Scriptures, as if to say that now the church has His *complete* revelation in written form.

Our Belgic Confession, in Articles 6 and 7, spell out the implications of the fact that the Scriptures alone are God’s word. The apocryphal books are not God’s word. Neither do any explanations of that word by men’s writings or speeches, or church councils, amount to additional revelation from God. To this the Reformed believer adds that the scriptures of other religions or sects, such as the Book of Mormon, the Koran, and other such books, are not God’s word. The gospels of Thomas, Judas, and Mary, which have caused a stir recently in Christian circles, are also not the written word of God.

To say that the 66 books of the Old and New Testament alone are God’s word to His people, and that these fully make known God’s will regarding what we must believe, how we must live, and how we are to worship God, is to have a high view of the Scriptures. Our Lord and Savior Himself had such a high view of them. He quoted from and referred to the Old Testament Scriptures often; He taught that the Scriptures could not be broken (John 10:35); He showed that His teachings conformed to them; and He came to fulfill them. Also the apostle Paul indicates in many places, Romans 15 among them, that he has a high view of the Scriptures. His quotes from the Old Testament to demonstrate the truth of what he is saying (Romans 15:3, 9, 10, 11, 12) indicate this high view, as does the central point he makes in Romans 15:4: the Scriptures “were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope!”

Because God’s word is written in the Scriptures, every faithful translation of the Scriptures fully conveys God’s word.

The fact is that we need translations of the Scriptures, for we speak and write a language different from the Hebrew and Greek languages in which they were originally written. In all likelihood, Paul himself used a translation—the Septuagint, a translation of the Old Testament Hebrew into Greek—when he referred in Romans 15 to passages from the Old Testament. Not only do we need translations, but these

translations are based on *copies* of the original Scriptures, and not the originals themselves. The originals are long out of existence. We celebrate today the anniversary of one particular translation of copies of the original Scriptures.

But this translation—the KJV—fully conveys God's word. That it fully conveys God's word means that by reading the KJV, the believing child of God will come to know all that is necessary to know for his salvation, and for thankful living. Even more: that it fully conveys God's word means, not just that the basic elements and barest minimum of God's revealed will is found in the KJV, but that God's revelation in the Scriptures is completely expressed.

The reader of the KJV can be certain that the KJV fully conveys God's word. Not only is it a translation of the written word of God, but it is a *faithful* translation. One can find errors of translation in it; and in any individual printing of the KJV, one can find errors of printing; but one does not find in the KJV errors of doctrine or errors that lead us to live contrary to what God requires us. And it is a faithful translation, not by accident: its translators made it their deliberate purpose to give a faithful translation.

How?

God's word was written by the wonder of inspiration.

To develop the doctrine of inspiration here is not my purpose; to defend it from its many attacks is beyond the scope of this meditation. But at this point we must do two things: assert the doctrine, and stand in amazement at the wonder of it.

The divine inspiration of the Scriptures is that wonder of God according to which He moved, illumined, and infallibly directed men to write His word.

That men were used to write the Scriptures is clear enough, and not a point of controversy. It is exactly this fact that leads some to say that the Scriptures are *merely* the word of men. Over against this, we say that the Scriptures, written by man, are *God's word*, by the wonder of inspiration.

Scripture itself teaches that it is inspired. The writers of the Scriptures often refer to them as "word of God." The writer of Psalm 119

spoke of God's law and God's word in the same breath—and by “law” he means more than just the Ten Commandments; the first five books of the Bible in their entirety were called “Torah.” (Often translated by the English word “law,” “torah,” as to its more basic meaning in the Hebrew, is “instruction.”) Paul referred to the written Scriptures when he wrote in Romans 9:6: “Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect.” Not only did Paul claim that *past* writings were God's word; he said this of his *own* writings: “For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord...” (I Thess. 4:15). Jesus, in His response to the devil's temptation that He turn stones into bread, indicates that the Scriptures are the written form of the words that God spoke: “It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God” (Matt. 4:4).

Two passages are classic texts that set forth the doctrine of inspiration. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (literally: “All Scripture is God-breathed”) reads the first part of II Timothy 3:16. God breathed, or spoke, the Scriptures—they are His word. And II Peter 1:20-21 reads: “Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation. For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.” While Peter speaks in verse 21 of the *speech* of these holy men, verse 20 shows that he speaks of that speech as it has been committed to *writing*. The content of the Scriptures is not the invention of man, and therefore no one man has an edge on the interpretation of the Scriptures—for the Holy Ghost moved men to write them, as the wind moves a ship across the waters.

That this view of inspiration is the view of Reformed churches, Article 3 of the Belgic Confession makes plain.

The inspiration of the Scriptures is *organic* in its character. This means two things. First, it means that Scripture itself is an organism—one living unity composed of diverse parts. The diversity of Scripture is seen in its being penned by different men, in different circumstances of life, with different gifts, at different ages. This diversity is also that some Scriptures were written as narrative and others as poetry; some speak of the past and others of the future. But in all this diversity contributes to the great unity of the Scriptures—Jesus Christ, as the

revelation of the will of God regarding our salvation. Second, by the term “organic inspiration” is meant that the revelation of God in the Scriptures grew and developed as an organism does—from the seed of Genesis 3:15 and the five books of Moses, to the Revelation of John.

Before the wonder of inspiration, we stand amazed.

The wonder of inspiration presupposes the wonder of revelation: God desired to reveal Himself to us, sinners, as the God of grace and mercy! God could have revealed Himself to us as a God of justice only. After the human race corrupted itself in Adam, God could have revealed Himself as the God who would punish and destroy humanity. But He did not reveal only that about Himself. He revealed also that He would provide Jesus Christ as the Lamb by whom atonement would be made, so that we could be received into mercy and covenant fellowship with Him again! His revelation regards His work of sovereignly and unilaterally establishing and maintaining His covenant of grace!

Still more: God not only wanted to *tell* us about this covenant of grace, but by His revelation He desired to (and actually does) *draw us into* this covenant of grace. His work of regeneration in our hearts is essential to our enjoying life with God, and this happens apart from the study of the Scriptures. However, when we regenerated children of God read and study God's revelation to us in the Scriptures, we experience this covenant life with God; we grow in it; and we find the pattern for our life, the way to live in covenant fellowship with Him.

Wonderful, the fact and purpose of inspiration!

Also amazing is the *manner* of inspiration. Although written from the hearts of men, out of men's life experiences, and from men's pens, Scripture is nothing less than God's word! An appropriate analogy to help us understand this incomprehensible wonder is the incarnation of Christ: He is fully God, and nothing less than God, but He came in the flesh through the virgin Mary. A wonder!

Amazing. With our God nothing is impossible.

Some make the mistake of applying the doctrine of inspiration to

particular Bible versions. Specifically, because the KJV is arguably the best English translation of the Bible today, some of its supporters claim that it is *an* inspired English version, if not *the* inspired English version.

I have personally spoken with individuals of such conviction.

But to assert that the KJV is an inspired version is a mistake—one that we must not make. We may argue that the KJV is a faithful translation of the original languages. We may call attention to God’s providential work of preserving His word through the KJV. But the version itself is not inspired.

The translators of the KJV did not claim to be inspired, as the original writers of Scripture did claim to be.

What can be said of the KJV, and what distinguishes it from some, even many (I do not say “all”), other English versions, is that the translators of the KJV *honored* the doctrine of inspiration. They understood that God’s inspiration was *verbal*—that it extended not just to the general thoughts of the Scriptures, but to every word. So they were concerned to translate the words, not only the sense, of the Scriptures. The principle of translation that the KJV translators used was not dynamic equivalence (putting more emphasis on the idea of the whole than the individual words), but literal (conveying the individual words accurately into the English language). So much did the KJV translators honor the doctrine of inspiration, that when they supplied words to help the translation flow well, or make sense, they put those supplied words in *italics*, alerting the reader to what they had done.

Why?

The question we face now is not why God gave us His word at all. Rather, the question is why God caused His word to be written, and not only spoken.

In his book *Doctrine According to Godliness*,¹ Ronald Hanko gives several reasons for this. Summarizing, these reasons all have to do with the permanence of the written word over the spoken, and

1. Ronald Hanko, *Doctrine According to Godliness: A Primer of Reformed Doctrine* (Jenison, MI: Reformed Free Publishing Association, 2004), p. 11.

with the fact that the written word is objective. Because men are liars, we are prone to twist the spoken word to our advantage; because our minds are corrupt, we misunderstand and corrupt the spoken word; and because we are sinful, we quickly forget or dismiss that which is spoken, but which does not appeal to us. But the written word is permanent, and therefore not as easily twisted and misunderstood. Of course, men *do* twist, misunderstand, and dismiss the written word. However, when that word is truth—unchanging truth, for all to know, as the Scriptures are (John 17:17)—then the twisting, misunderstanding, and dismissing of that word manifests man's folly and hatred of God. God gave His word in written form to His people so that we can better understand His revelation, receive it as truth, and govern our lives by it.

The notable example of the Bereans underscores the value of having the word not only spoken, but also written: they searched the *written* word daily, concluding from their search that the *spoken* word of Paul was true (Acts 17:11).

Likewise, II Peter 1 underscores the value of the written word. Peter conveyed in his epistle the gospel regarding “the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (v. 16), which gospel is no “cunningly devised fable” but is the word of God Himself. Peter knew that this gospel was true, for he, along with James and John, heard the voice of God on the Mount of Transfiguration (17f.). But the “more sure word of prophecy,” by which those to whom Peter wrote would know that Peter spoke truly, was not the word *spoken*, but the word *written*—the Scriptures (19ff.).

Not only the objectivity and permanence of the written word over against the spoken, but also the saving benefits of the Scriptures for the church, are reasons why God gave us His word in written form.

II Timothy 3:16-17 directs our attention to these benefits: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

I find that verse 16 speaks of two basic benefits for the church—

doctrine and godliness—which two basic benefits are viewed both positively and negatively, accounting for the four terms. Scripture is profitable for “doctrine,” that is, positively, to teach us the truth. It is also profitable for “reproof.” The word is translated “evidence” in Hebrews 11:1, and in II Timothy 3:16 has the idea of evidence that false teaching is false. From the Scriptures, we come to learn what we must know for salvation, and can discern what is wrong teaching.

Then, Scripture is profitable for “correction.” That is, the Scriptures are able to restore to an upright walk the child of God who has been walking in sin. This applies not only to those who transgress God’s law in gross ways. Each of us, reading the Scriptures, finds in himself thoughts, attitudes, feelings, words, and actions that are contrary to God’s will, and from which he must turn. Whereas “correction” indicates a turning from sin to godliness, “instruction in righteousness” refers to our being taught how to continue in and maintain this godly walk.

Put these two together—doctrine and godliness—and consider them from both viewpoints—negative and positive—and see that, of all written words, only the Holy Scriptures have the power to do these things! No wonder they are “able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (15), and have the effect of perfecting God’s people, and equipping them unto all good works (17)!

Similarly, Romans 15:4 and its context speak to the benefits that we glean from Scripture.

Verse 4 is clear: the Scriptures “were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.” Again one finds the same two main thoughts as in II Timothy 3:16: doctrine and godliness. The word “learning” is the same as “doctrine” in II Timothy 3:16: the Scriptures teach us the truth about God. To enjoy salvation, we must know God, for salvation is covenantal in character, that is, it is the work of God bringing us into fellowship with Him. This requires us to know Him. This knowledge gives us hope—the certain confidence and sure expectation that God will fulfill all His promises to us, that He will be with us in all the struggles of

this life, will lead us to the glorious end He has determined for us, and will make all things new for His church.

But by what means does God give us this hope? “Through patience and comfort of the Scriptures.” I take “of the Scriptures” to refer to patience as well as comfort. In our trials and discouragements, the Holy Spirit uses the Scriptures to cause us to be patient, that is, to endure and persevere. We do not leave the Christian faith, when discouraged; we continue in our hope. And the Holy Spirit comes alongside us in the Scriptures, comforting us and bearing us up. When we doubt, fear, or are discouraged, God’s written word—perhaps as it is preached, or brought by a fellow saint—encourages us.

What a reason for the officebearers of the church of Jesus Christ to use the Scriptures in their work! Let the pastors bring this word of God to the people of God from the pulpit, in the catechism room, at the sick bed, and in all pastoral counseling! Let the elders bring this word in their work of family visiting and discipline, and the deacons in their work of caring for the needy in the church! As officebearers, we deal with God’s sheep who at times seem to be unable to be helped. Certainly we cannot help them in our own strength. But what comfort and patience, what instruction and hope, God does give His own through the Scriptures!

Also the context of Romans 15:4 speaks of the benefit of our having the written word of God. The previous context, Romans 15:1-3, reminds us that we who are strong must bear the infirmities of the weak, and not please ourselves. In the church of Christ, and in every congregation, we will find those who are weak and those who are strong. The weak manifest their weak faith perhaps by repeatedly falling into sin, or by expressing scruples about minor things in the church or in life. Those who are strong pattern their lives after the truths of salvation, and do not stumble over indifferent things. Rather than despising the weak, the strong must bear the infirmities of the weak, and work to build them up. Then, from the written word of God, a quotation of Psalm 69:9, in setting forth the example of Christ: “For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.” Christ bore the infirmities of the weak—of you and me, and the church in every age! He devoted

Himself selflessly to the salvation of the church! The written word points us to His example.

The following context continues the thought: bearing the infirmities of the weak means that we must receive the weak into our communion (v. 7). This receiving one another is not merely a matter of officebearers admitting these into the church of Christ, but it is a matter of God's people receiving such into their own hearts and lives in loving fellowship. Again, Jesus is the example, and several passages from the Old Testament are quoted to show that Jesus received the weak—Gentiles!—into saving fellowship with Him.

If verse 4 reminds officebearers to use the Scriptures in their work, the context of verse 4 reminds them to use these Scriptures in their own personal lives. We cannot work, until we have been strengthened and encouraged and given the hope of being received into communion with Christ; we cannot bring the word of God until we have been brought under the word. Do we grow weary of our congregations? Are there some in the congregation who test our patience, on whom we would quickly lay the blame for our impatience because they are “weak”? Are we frustrated with slow progress on the part of the congregation, or some in it, to apply the doctrines of grace to their own outward lives? Behold the patience of Christ toward His people—toward *us* as sinners! If God's word had not been written, we would not see that example of Christ so clearly.

This example of Christ is powerful. Christ not only points officebearers in the direction they must go in their work, but He also gives them power to follow His example. We partake of His anointing—as Christians, and particularly as officebearers. He works in His church through the officebearers. Let us strive, by His power, to live like Him!

This being the benefit of the written word of God for us, we must certainly use the Scriptures. And we must use a translation of the Scriptures that is faithful.

If Scripture is useful for doctrine, the officebearer must be wary of a version that corrupts true doctrine.

If Scripture is useful for doctrine and life because it is God's in-

spired word, the version that is most faithful to the original Scriptures will be the most useful for our work and in our personal lives.

As officebearers in the PRC today, this is a reason to be thankful to God for the KJV. God has, in His providence, given us a version that is faithful in doctrine and faithful as a translation. It fully conveys the word of God. So it, too, is profitable for doctrine and godliness; and it too can provide the patience and comfort by which we, and all of God's people, have hope. ●

Restoring the Bible to the Believer: The Reformation's Concern Over Bible Translation

Russell Dykstra

Introduction

The great sixteenth-century Reformation was a powerful work of God restoring His church back to the Bible in every area—doctrine, worship, church government, and life. Headed especially by Luther, this reformation was carried on by a host of dedicated and capable men, including Zwingli and Calvin, whom God raised up for the work.

Since the Reformation was a return to the Bible, it should surprise no one that the Reformers were men who were—in their lives and work—closely tied to the Bible. In fact, if we were to pick out one personal conviction, one characteristic passion, found in every single Reformer, it would be this: Love for, devotion to, and zeal for the Bible as the Word of God. That this is true is plain from five realities in their lives. First, most were preachers, fully committed to the gospel ministry: They preached twice on Sunday, and, in many churches, in daily worship services during the week. Instructing people of God in the truths of the Word was their passion.

Second, their love for the Bible is evident in their writing. Commentaries on the Bible poured forth from the pens of the Reformers. In addition, their theological works were deliberately grounded in Scripture. The Bible was their source and their authority.

Third, in their battles against errors of Rome and the defense of the faith against the attacks of Rome, the Bible was their weapon, their sword. As they built up the church from the ruins of Rome, the Bible was also their trowel.

Fourth, they consistently made the center of the worship Bible reading and preaching.

Finally, the Reformers' love for the Word is plain from their zeal for getting the Bible into the hands of the members of their congrega-

tions. To do that they had to get the Bible into the language of the people.

This same devotion to God's Word was found in those who are sometimes identified as "Pre-Reformers"—John Wyclif and John Hus.

Wyclif (a fourteenth-century English scholar) emphasized the authority of the Bible over against the false teachings of the Pope, whom Wyclif eventually came to identify as Antichrist. He trained young men to be preachers of the Word (Lollards). He also translated much of the Bible into English.

John Hus was a monk in Bohemia. Renowned for his bold preaching in the language of the people, he was appointed preacher in a large church in Prague. He desired "to hold, believe, and assert whatever is contained in [the Scriptures] as long as I have breath in me." Concerning Hus, Luther would later write: "I was overwhelmed with astonishment, I could not understand for what cause they had burnt so great a man, who explained the Scriptures with so much gravity and skill." (Both quotations from Christian History.net.)

The focus of this article is this great zeal of the Reformers for the Bible, and in particular the urgency for getting the Bible into the vernacular, into the language of the people of God. First, we will examine the history, looking briefly at the Reformation's activity of getting the Bible translated, and then examining the lives of the main Reformers briefly to demonstrate their zeal. Next we will notice that what lay behind this zeal was their conviction on two matters in which the Reformers differed in fundamental ways from Rome on the one hand, and from the radicals of the Reformation on the other hand, namely, their view of Scripture, and their view of the believer. And, finally, we will face the question of the significance of this for the church today.

History of Bible Translations

The history of Bible translating in the Middle Ages is dismal and almost depressing. So few translations were made. The reasons for this paucity are several. First, few people had the knowledge or skill to produce translations. In many lands it was common that the local

preacher could not even read. Knowledge of the original languages (Hebrew for the Old Testament, Greek for the New) had virtually died out. Almost no one could read these languages.

Second, virtually no market existed for Bible translations. Few could read. And besides, no mass production was possible. Hence, if a man would spend many years of his life translating the Bible, only a few hand copies could be made of the translation. No one could earn a living doing this work.

Third, the Church of the Middle Ages held the Latin Vulgate to be the inspired translation. The Church discouraged even the theologians from using the Hebrew and Greek in their exegesis. The Medieval Church frowned upon, discouraged, and sometimes forbade the common people reading the Bible in their own language. At the beginning of the Middle Ages that was not so. But in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, a couple of sects arose in the church that, having translated some of the Bible, began to criticize the Church for her teaching and/or practices (the Cathari in France, the poor men of Lyon, the Waldensians). The Church cracked down on these groups, persecuting and killing many. And the Church began the practice of discouraging and even forbidding the common people to read or to own translations of the Bible in the vernacular.

There were a few translations available in several different languages. Most often these included only selections of Scripture—gospel accounts and passages for worship services or passages connected with church holy days. Besides, these were often poor, wooden translations made from the Latin Vulgate.

With the coming of the Reformers, however, things changed remarkably. God prepared the way for translations in especially two ways. The first is the Renaissance. Dating from the mid-thirteenth century, the Renaissance brought a revival of interest in the ancient cultures, languages, and sources. This included the Greek and Hebrew. These languages became a common part of the curriculum in the colleges and universities. This in turn would give rise to theologians who were well equipped to translate both the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament.

The second way God prepared the way for Bible translations was

through the invention of the printing press, with its movable type. Johannes Guttenberg was the first European to use this in the 1440s and 50s. Though it was slow and clumsy by today's standards, it was revolutionary. Concurrent with this were improvements in paper and ink as well. Now Bibles could be mass produced.

Reformers' Involvement in Translations

Many Reformers were involved in translations—directly or indirectly. Luther translated the Bible into German. A translation based mainly on Zwingli's work was printed in Zurich. Calvin wrote part of the introduction to a French Bible and personally made improvements on the translation from time to time. John a Lasko was a main contributor to a translation in Polish. Knox encouraged a translation in English arising out of his congregation in Geneva, resulting in the Genevan Bible of 1560. Hungarian Calvinist Gáspár Károli translated the Bible into Hungarian. That translation is called the *Bible of Vizsoly*, after the town where it was first published in 1590. Genevan theologian Diodati's translation of the Bible into Italian was completed in 1607. And in 1619, the great synod of Dordt authorized a new translation of the Bible in Dutch.

From the difficulty involved in the task, and the tremendous commitment of time and energy, it is evident that the matter of Bible translations was significant for these men. Luther hid himself in the Wartburg Castle for eleven months in the heat of the turmoil. He translated the entire New Testament in those eleven months, so formidable a task, that no minister today would attempt it. Consider that he did this not in a well lit office, but in a castle, where the days were often dark, and the lighting minimal, and his health only fair.

Luther would write from the castle to his friend Nicholas von Amsdorf back in Wittenberg:

In the meantime I shall translate the Bible, although I have here shouldered a burden beyond my power. Now I realize what it means to translate, and why no one has previously undertaken it who would disclose his name. Of course I will not be able to touch the Old Testament all by myself and without the co-operation of all of you. [He wanted to return in secret to Wittenberg, for:] I would...with your

help...translate the whole book from the beginning, so that it would be a worthy translation for Christians to read. For I hope we will give a better translation to our Germany than the Latins have. It is a great and worthy undertaking on which we all should work, since it is a public matter and should be dedicated to the common good.

Luther was not the only German who considered it important to have the Bible translated. In two months, 5000 copies of Luther's translation of the New Testament sold. It would take another huge effort over the next 12 years to complete the translation of the Old Testament, with help from Hebrew scholars back in Wittenberg.

Luther's translation is hailed as a masterpiece. It is often called Luther's single greatest work. Church historian Philip Schaff explains that

it was a republication of the gospel. He made the Bible the people's book in church, school, and house. If he had done nothing else, he would have been one of the greatest benefactors of the German-speaking race.¹

A. Skevington Wood writes:

In providing the German people with the Bible in their own tongue, Luther not only bestowed on them a unique spiritual and literary treasure, which was to become part of the national inheritance. He also ensured, maybe to a greater degree than he realized himself, that the witness of the Reformation would be maintained. Protestantism is the religion of the Word, and by letting loose the Bible in Germany, Luther laid the most stable foundation possible for the future. Nor was this confined to Germany. A chain reaction was set up, which resulted in similar translations into the vernacular all over Europe and beyond. Luther may have been hemmed in by the stout walls of the Warburg castellan, when he started on his truly monumental enterprise: but the Word of God was not bound, nor could it be.²

1 Quoted in A. Skevington Wood, *Captive to the Word*, 103.

2 *Captive*, 104.

The value that the Reformers placed upon Bible translations can also be seen from the cost to their lives. After his death, Wyclif was condemned by the Council of Constance (the same Council that condemned and burned Hus). In 1429 the church officials were able to reveal their hatred of Wyclif by digging up his bones and burning them. Tyndale lost his life in 1536 in the Lowlands on account of his translating work. Calvin knew that he was putting his life in serious danger by writing prefaces to the French translation of the Bible. Daring to translate often meant hiding, fleeing, and for some, death.

If one wonders why they yet endeavored with such commitment to get the Bible into the hands of the people in the vernacular, the reason is they placed a very high value on the Bible. They had no doubt that it was the very Word of God, infallibly inspired. They considered the knowledge of the Bible necessary for salvation. The Bible was the supreme and only authority for faith and life.

A brief glimpse of the life and experiences of Luther demonstrates how he came to hold the Bible in such high regard.

Luther had contact with the Bible from the time that he went to school as a young boy. Portions of Scripture were studied in connection with his school instruction. We are told that with his own money he purchased a book containing selections of Scripture in German. When Luther entered the monastery in Erfurt, he was given his own copy of the Bible (in Latin), which he read diligently.

Luther's zeal for Scripture, however, cannot be understood without knowing the nature and severity of his spiritual struggles. His struggle was for peace of soul. He had a deep and dreadful sense of God's wrath due to his sins. Luther longed to be delivered from the terror of God's just wrath, and to know God's grace and mercy. But how was he to obtain that?

The answer of the monastery was: Obedience. Obey God; keep His law. Good works are the means of obtaining God's favor. At Luther's profession for the priesthood in September of 1506, the prior would have said to Luther: "Keep this rule, and I promise you eternal life." The "rule" was the disciplinary code of his Augustinian order.

About that, Luther later wrote: “I had no other thoughts, but to keep my rule.”³

He did so with astounding rigor. He would later write:

I myself was a monk for twenty years. I tortured myself with prayers, fasting, vigils, and freezing: the frost alone might have killed me. It caused me pain such as I will never inflict on myself again, even if I could. What else did I seek by doing this but God, who was supposed to note my strict observance of the monastic order and my austere life?.....I did all this for the sake of God, not for money or goods.⁴

He admitted, “I vexed myself with fasts and prayers beyond what was common.” And he declared: “If I could have got to heaven by fasting, I would have merited that twenty years ago.”⁵

But all to no avail. His agonies of physical mortification, mental distress, doubt and uncertainty, and his disturbed conscience continued. Christ was no comfort either. He wrote:

I was often frightened by the name of Christ and when I looked upon Him and the cross, He seemed to me like a flash of lightning. When His name was mentioned, I would rather have heard the devil mentioned, for I believed that I would have to do good works until Christ was made gracious to me through them.⁶

He sought some solid ground to rest upon and could not find it.

According to God’s perfect plan, in 1512 Luther was appointed Doctor of Sacred Scripture in the University of Wittenberg. He began lecturing on Genesis. By 1513 he was into the Psalms. There he was to struggle with the phrase “In thy righteousness deliver me” (Psalms 31 and 71). He could not understand why a sinner would cry out for God to *deliver* in *righteousness*. Was not God’s righteousness the way of judgment?

In Psalm 22 he encountered Christ’s cry, “Why hast thou forsaken

3 *Captive*, 25

4 *Captive*, 25.

5 *Captive*, 26.

6 *Captive*, 29.

me?” Luther wrestled with this, perplexed. Luther had himself known this angst of soul, but it was because of his sins that he knew God’s wrath. Why would Christ experience this? The answer that Luther came to was this: It was because Christ had become sin for His people.

In this struggle with the Word, Luther gained significant insights. Specifically, he gained a new view of Christ, as Savior. Secondly, a new view of God, as the Almighty, *and* the all-loving God. Third, he realized that the cross of Christ is found in all of Scripture.

But his struggle was not yet complete. It came down to what is known as Luther’s “Tower Experience,” which occurred probably in the fall of 1514. Allow Luther himself to describe it.

Though I lived as a monk without reproach, I felt that I was a sinner before God with an extremely disturbed conscience. I could not believe that he was placated by my satisfaction. I did not love, yes, I hated the righteous God who punishes sinners, and secretly, if not blasphemously, certainly murmuring greatly, I was angry with God, and said, “As if, indeed, it is not enough, that miserable sinners, eternally lost through original sin, are crushed by every kind of calamity by the law of the decalogue, without having God add pain to pain by the gospel and also by the gospel threatening us with his righteousness and wrath!” Thus I raged with a fierce and troubled conscience. Nevertheless, I beat importunately upon Paul at that place, most ardently desiring to know what St. Paul wanted.

At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, “In it the righteousness of God is revealed, as it is written, ‘He who through faith is righteous shall live.’” There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely, the passive righteousness with which merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “He who through faith is righteous shall live.” Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. There a totally other face of the entire Scripture showed itself to me. Thereupon I ran through the Scriptures from memory. I also found in other terms an analogy, as, the work of God, that is, what God does in us, the power of God,

with which he makes us strong, the wisdom of God, with which he makes us wise, the strength of God, the salvation of God, the glory of God.

And I extolled my sweetest word with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the word “righteousness of God.” Thus that place in Paul was for me truly the gate to paradise. Later I read Augustine’s *The Spirit and the Letter*, where contrary to hope I found that he, too, interpreted God’s righteousness in a similar way, as the righteousness with which God clothes us when he justifies us.⁷

A. Skevington Wood shows the importance of the Bible in Luther’s struggle.

[I]t is recognized that the renewal he initiated was in the first instance theological rather than either ecclesiastical or political. It arose, moreover, from his own encounter with God in the Scriptures. It was because he thus experienced divine grace in Christ, through the medium of the written Word, that henceforward the Bible was to be central in the Reformation. Throughout his career as a remodeller of the Church, Luther occupied the chair of biblical exegesis at the University of Wittenberg. As he himself often explained, it was simply as he fulfilled his academic function of expounding the Word of God that the Reformation was effected. The title he most cherished was “Doctor of Sacred Scripture.”⁸

At long last, Luther could rejoice in Christ: “Thank God we again have his Word, which pictures and portrays Christ as our righteousness.”⁹

Luther’s personal conviction soon came out in the battles of the Reformation. Already at the Leipzig debate with Johann Eck (July, 1519), Luther defended the position that Scripture was the supreme authority—above the pope and above councils.

But it was at the Diet of Worms, before princes, bishops, and

7 *Luther's Works* (J. J. Pelikan, H. C. Oswald & H. T. Lehmann, ed.), vol. 34, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 336-7.

8 *Captive*, 7.

9 *Captive*, 30.

Emperor Charles himself, with his life on the line, that Luther made his ultimate stand for the supreme authority of Scripture for him. Asked to recant all that he had written, Luther respectfully but firmly refused, concluding with what he called “a simple answer”:

Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason (for I do not trust either in the pope or in councils alone, since it is well known that they have often erred and contradicted themselves), I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not retract anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. I cannot do otherwise, here I stand, may God help me, Amen.”¹⁰

Similar were the life experiences of the other Reformers. Zwingli’s change into a Swiss Reformer, though not as profound as Luther’s, was the result of his study of the Bible, and his preaching through most of it in Zurich. Calvin’s steadfast personal adherence to the Word is well known and, as we will see later, it is deeply spiritual and even moving.

Fundamental Differences

Thus we see that the Reformers were personally convicted of the importance of the Bible. The Church of Rome was not of the same mind. Why this major difference between the views of the Reformers and those of Rome? The answer: Fundamental differences separate them on two basic doctrines: Scripture itself, and the believer.

To understand Rome’s (low) view of Scripture, one must first know Rome’s (exceedingly high) view of the Romish Church. For Rome, the Church is everything. In the Romish form of the Apostles’ Creed, they confess: I believe *in* the holy catholic church. Not: I believe *an* holy catholic church, that is, I believe that there is one, holy, universal church of Jesus. Rather, confesses Rome: I believe *in* God, and I believe *in* the church. The Church (of Rome) saves. The Church is the repository of grace. It is the preserver of truth. It is the mediator who stands between the believer and God and saves the believer.

¹⁰ *Luther's Works*, vol. 32, 111.

Thus, put your faith in the Church. Believe that the Church is correct in all that she teaches.

Rome maintains that the Church holds and preserves the truth. According to Rome, God gave that truth to the Church in two ways. One way is the written revelation, namely, the Bible. The other is tradition, which is the revelation that Christ spoke to His apostles and the truths that the Spirit gave to the apostles. These are not written down, but are passed down from the apostles, especially through Peter, and then through the bishops, especially Rome's, to the present day. The tradition is infallible revelation. The Church preserves it. It is set forth also in the decisions of councils, the decretals of popes, and even the writings of the fathers (which writings of the fathers, Rome foolishly insists, are unanimous).

Different View of the Bible

On *what* the Bible is, Rome and the Reformation ostensibly agreed: The Bible is the very Word of God. However, already in 1586 two men in the Jesuit College in Louvain were teaching an inspiration that was not verbal—that the Spirit gave inspiration for the thought, but not the actual words. These men were not allowed to continue teaching this, but this idea would in fact develop in Romish circles, to the point that some would eventually teach that there were books written by men that the Spirit put His approval on after the fact, since the books were without error. In contrast, Reformers insisted on verbal inspiration, namely, that the very words that the writers put on paper were the words the Spirit intended.

The issues on the Bible debated by Rome and the Reformers were in four particular areas: 1) The Authority of Scripture; 2) The Necessity of Scripture; 3) The Clarity of Scripture; 4) The Sufficiency of Scripture.

First, concerning the *Authority of Scripture*, both Rome and the Reformers acknowledged that the Bible has authority as the Word of God. They differed as to *why* the Bible has authority to *us*. Rome said that the reason is that the Church says it has authority. Their argument ran something like this. The church came before the Bible, temporally and logically. The church existed before the Bible. The church does

not owe its existence or authority to the Bible. But, argued Rome, the Bible came from the church, and the church identifies it as the Word of God, preserves it, explains it, and defends it.

The Reformers, on the other hand, insisted that the ground of the Bible's authority is Scripture itself. They described it as the self-attested trustworthiness (*autopistia*) of Scripture.

Rome, therefore, distinguishes between the authority of the Bible with respect to itself (*quoad se*), which authority is due to the fact that it is God's Word, and the authority that the Bible has with respect to us (*quoad nos*)—which is due to the fact the Church identifies the books that belong to the canon *and* assures us that they are authoritative.

Rome cleverly argued its case in connection with the books that belong to the Bible. You Reformers say that the Bible witnesses to itself. However, there is no list in the Bible of all the books that are canonical—that belong to the Bible. Who decides that? The *Church* determines which books belong to the Bible. Thus, only the Church provides divine, infallible certainly, not only that these books are the Word of God, but also that they have authority. You can believe what the Bible teaches because the Church says the Bible is trustworthy.

Reformers would not budge. The Bible itself demonstrated that it is God's Word. Because it is the Word of God, it must be believed.

The second difference involved the *Necessity of Scripture*. Rome's position is that the Bible is not strictly necessary. The *Church* is necessary as the one who holds and sets forth the truth. The Bible is useful, but not necessary. Rome's proof was twofold: 1) The church existed before the Bible, and 2) The church has the truth in the infallible tradition, even without the Bible.

The Reformers, on the other hand, insisted that Scripture is necessary. They argued contra Rome that, though the church was before the *Bible*, the church was not before the Word of God. God spoke His Word to Adam, to the patriarchs, and the prophets. They always had that Word, even when in seed form. God determined to write down that Word to guard against the corrupting of God's Word (Calvin).

The Reformers third controversy with Rome was over *the clarity (perspicuity) of Scripture*.

Rome maintained that the Bible is unclear. Thus, averred Rome,

to allow all the people to read and study the Bible will result in many interpretations. That in turn will create uncertainty and doubt, and the faith of the people will rest on mere opinions. Someone must give the final judgment on the various interpretations. Who? The Church.

The Council of Trent was called to stop the spread of the Reformation. It met intermittently from 1545 to 1563. It was Rome's attempt to answer the Reformation. One of the first matters on which it deliberated and pontificated was Scripture and Tradition. Trent said this (emphasis mine, RJD):

Furthermore, to check unbridled spirits, it decrees that *no one relying on his own judgment shall*, in matters of faith and morals pertaining to the edification of Christian doctrine, distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with his own conceptions, *presume to interpret them contrary to that sense which holy mother Church, to whom it belongs to judge of their true sense and interpretation, has held and holds*, or even contrary to the unanimous teaching of the Fathers, even though such interpretations should never at any time be published.

The Reformation rejected that out of hand. The Bible is clear (perspicuous). The Reformers, by insisting on this, were not denying 1) that Scripture is deep and profound, nor 2) that there are difficult passages. But they insisted that the revelation of God and of salvation is clear enough that all can understand. Every believer should read it, they maintained. This restores freedom of conscience to the believer. The people were not obligated to believe simply what the Church required of them. They could study the Bible and believe it because God said it.

What about all the different interpretations about which Rome warned? The Reformers answered: Scripture interprets Scripture. That is the principle that must be followed. Scripture must be the final judge in all controversy.

Fourth, the Reformation also parted ways with Rome over the *Sufficiency of Scripture*.

Rome taught that Scripture is not sufficient for us. Parts of Scripture are incomplete and need to be augmented by tradition. The Council of Trent, after pointing out that Christ commanded the gospel

“to be preached by His Apostles to every creature as the source at once of all saving truth and rules of conduct,” added:

[The Council] also clearly perceives that these truths and rules are contained in the *written books and in the unwritten traditions*, which, received by the Apostles from the mouth of Christ Himself, or from the Apostles themselves, the Holy Ghost dictating, have come down to us, transmitted as it were from hand to hand. Following, then, the examples of the orthodox Fathers, *it receives and venerates with a feeling of piety and reverence all the books both of the Old and New Testaments*, since one God is the author of both; *also the traditions*, whether they relate to faith or to morals, *as having been dictated either orally by Christ or by the Holy Ghost, and preserved in the Catholic Church in unbroken succession....*

If anyone does not accept as sacred and canonical the aforesaid books in their entirety and with all their parts, as they have been accustomed to be read in the Catholic Church and as they are contained in the old Latin Vulgate Edition, *and knowingly and deliberately rejects the aforesaid traditions*, let him be anathema.

Over against that, the Reformation insisted: Scripture is perfect, and it is sufficient. It contains all that is necessary for the believer to know for his faith and for his walk of life.

To be sure, the Reformers did not reject all tradition. On the contrary, they highly honored the work of the church fathers. But they tested the work of these men with Scripture, and rejected all that was contrary to Scripture.

We must also point out that the Reformers were between Rome and another enemy of Scripture, namely, the radicals. The radicals were people who had come out of Rome in the time of the Reformation. For a time they were with Luther and the other Reformers. With Luther in Wittenberg were the Zwickau prophets (called this because they claimed to receive special revelations from the Spirit). Another radical was Carlstadt—a close associate of Luther in the beginning. Groups of radicals were found in all the cities of the Reformation—Zurich, Geneva, Bern, etc. There was a wide variety of radicals. Most were Anabaptists (rebaptizers),

because they rejected infant baptism. Some believed in special revelation from God.

If Rome emphasized the importance of tradition and the church, the radicals went in the opposite direction—they rejected all the fathers. More serious than that, they denigrated even the Bible itself. Rejecting the necessity of Scripture, the radicals mocked it as the “dead letter.” Not the dead letter, but the Spirit was needed, they taught.

Calvin recognized this enemy on the right. In his masterful answer to the Roman Catholic bishop Sadolet, Calvin wrote:

We are assailed by two sects, which seem to differ most widely from each other. For what similitude is there in appearance between the Pope and the Anabaptists? And yet, that you may see that Satan never transforms himself so cunningly, as not in some measure to betray himself, the principal weapon with which they both assail us is the same. For when they boast extravagantly of the Spirit, the tendency certainly is to sink and bury the Word of God, that they may make room for their own falsehoods.

The radicals held that every individual has the right to interpret Scripture as he wished, as he was guided by the Holy Spirit. Sebastian Frank viewed the Bible as “a book sealed with seven seals which none can open unless he has the key of David, which is the illumination of the Spirit.”¹¹

These men despised the testimony of the fathers. Frank wrote in 1530: “Foolish Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory—of whom not one even knew the Lord, so help me God, nor was sent by God to teach. Rather, they were all apostles of Antichrist.”¹²

In his *Institutes*, Calvin takes aim at the dreadfully wrong attitude of these radicals.

Those who, rejecting Scripture, imagine that they have some peculiar way of penetrating to God, are to be deemed not so much under the influence of error as madness. For certain giddy men have lately appeared, who, while they make a great display of the superiority of the

11 Keith Mathison, *The Shape of Sola Scriptura*, 126.

12 Mathison, *Sola Scriptura*, 127.

Spirit, reject all reading of the Scriptures themselves, and deride the simplicity of those who only delight in what they call the dead and deadly letter. But I wish they would tell me what spirit it is whose inspiration raises them to such a sublime height that they dare despise the doctrine of Scripture as mean and childish. If they answer that it is the Spirit of Christ, their confidence is exceedingly ridiculous; since they will, I presume, admit that the apostles and other believers in the primitive Church were not illuminated by any other Spirit. None of these thereby learned to despise the word of God, but every one was imbued with greater reverence for it, as their writings most clearly testify (I.9.1).

Most of Calvin's discussion of Scripture has an eye on Rome's erroneous view of Scripture. Calvin's treatment of Scripture is marvelous, spiritual, never an academic argument. In the first book of the Institutes, as he is discussing the knowledge of God, Calvin writes (I.7.1):

Before proceeding farther, it seems proper to make some observations on the authority of Scripture, in order that our minds may not only be prepared to receive it with reverence, but be divested of all doubt.

When that which professes to be the Word of God is acknowledged to be so, no person, unless devoid of common sense and the feelings of a man, will have the desperate hardihood to refuse credit to the speaker. But since no daily responses are given from heaven, and the Scriptures are the only records in which God has been pleased to consign his truth to perpetual remembrance, the full authority which they ought to possess with the faithful is not recognised, unless they are believed to have come from heaven, as directly as if God had been heard giving utterance to them.

Then Calvin takes pointed aim at Rome's idea that the authority of Scripture for the believer is based on the church's authority. (Emphasis mine, RJD.)

A most pernicious error has very generally prevailed; viz., that Scripture is of importance only in so far as conceded to it by the suffrage of the Church; as if the eternal and inviolable truth of God

could depend on the will of men. *With great insult to the Holy Spirit, it is asked, Who can assure us that the Scriptures proceeded from God; who guarantee that they have come down safe and unimpaired to our times; who persuade us that this book is to be received with reverence, and that one expunged from the list, did not the Church regulate all these things with certainty?* On the determination of the Church, therefore, it is said, depend both the reverence which is due to Scripture, and the books which are to be admitted into the canon. Thus profane men, seeking, under the pretext of the Church, to introduce unbridled tyranny, care not in what absurdities they entangle themselves and others, provided they extort from the simple this one acknowledgment, viz., that there is nothing which the Church cannot do. *But what is to become of miserable consciences in quest of some solid assurance of eternal life, if all the promises with regard to it have no better support than man's judgment? On being told so, will they cease to doubt and tremble?* On the other hand, to what jeers of the wicked is our faith subjected—into how great suspicion is it brought with all, if believed to have only a precarious authority lent to it by the good will of men?

Over against Rome, Calvin insists, that the testimony of Scripture and the Spirit are the only reasons that the Bible is authoritative.

(I.7.5) Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments....

Surely some proofs can be laid out, that the Bible is the word of God. Calvin lists such things as: its beauty, harmony, miracles, fulfillment of prophecies, faithfulness of martyrs believing the Bible (I.8.13). Then he writes:

There are other reasons, neither few nor feeble, by which the dignity and majesty of the Scriptures may be not only proved to the pious, but also completely vindicated against the cavils of slanderers. These, however, cannot of themselves produce a firm faith in Scripture until our heavenly Father manifest his presence in it, and thereby secure

implicit reverence for it. Then only, therefore, does Scripture suffice to give a saving knowledge of God when its certainty is founded on the inward persuasion of the Holy Spirit. Still the human testimonies which go to confirm it will not be without effect, if they are used in subordination to that chief and highest proof, as secondary helps to our weakness. But it is foolish to attempt to prove to infidels that the Scripture is the Word of God. This it cannot be known to be, except by faith.

On the Office of Believer

As noted above, a second major difference separated Rome from the Reformers, namely their respective views of the believer, as related to the Bible. Rome insisted that only the teaching Church can interpret the Bible. The Bishops of the Church, with the Pope at their head, alone are infallible interpreters of the Bible. The people may read it, though they may not deviate from the interpretation of the Church. We have seen already that this was not the stand of the Church early on, but in the Middle Ages, gradually, the Church took the Bible out of the hands of the people.

The Reformers were incensed against this restriction. Already in 1520, Luther addressed this in a treatise entitled *The Reform of the Christian Estate*.

The second [wall separating the clergy from the non-clergy] was and is still more flimsy and worthless. They wish to be the only Masters of the Holy Scriptures, even though in all their lives they learn nothing from them. They assume for themselves sole authority, and with insolent juggling of words they would persuade us that the pope, whether he be a bad man or a good man, cannot err in matters of faith, and yet they cannot prove a single letter of it. Hence it comes that so many heretical and unchristian, nay, even unnatural ordinances have a place in the canon law, of which, however, there is no present need to speak. For since they think that the Holy Spirit never leaves them, be they never so unlearned and wicked, they make bold to decree whatever they will. And if it were true, where would be the need or use of the Holy Scriptures? Let us burn them, and be satisfied with the unlearned lords at Rome, who are possessed of the Holy Spirit—although He can possess only pious hearts! Unless I had

read it myself, I could not have believed that the devil would make such clumsy pretensions as Rome, and find a following.

Luther sets forth what was a theme in the Reformation:

Besides, ...we are all priests, ...and all have one faith, one Gospel, one sacrament, [so] why should we not also have the power to test and judge what is correct or incorrect in matters of faith? What becomes of the words of Paul in I Corinthians 2: "He that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man," and II Corinthians 4: "We have all the same Spirit of faith"? Why, then, should not we perceive what squares with faith and what does not, as well as does an unbelieving pope?

All these and many other texts should make us bold and free, and we should not allow the Spirit of liberty, as Paul calls Him, to be frightened off by the fabrications of the popes, but we ought to go boldly forward to test all that they do or leave undone, according to our interpretation of the Scriptures, which rests on faith, and compel them to follow not their own interpretation, but the one that is better. In the olden days Abraham had to listen to his Sarah, although she was in more complete subjection to him than we are to anyone on earth. Balaam's ass, also, was wiser than the prophet himself. If God then spoke by an ass against a prophet, why should He not be able even now to speak by a righteous man against the pope? In like manner St. Paul rebukes St. Peter as a man in error. Therefore it behooves every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to rebuke all errors.

Calvin likewise wrote to Sadolet of the same matters:

Hence arises that power of judging which we attribute to the Church, and wish to preserve unimpaired. For how much soever the world may fluctuate and jar with contending opinions, the faithful soul is never so destitute as not to have a straight course to salvation. I do not, however, dream of a perspicacity of faith which never errs in discriminating between truth and falsehood, is never deceived, nor do I figure to myself an arrogance which looks down as from a height on the whole human race, waits for no man's judgment, and makes no distinction between learned and unlearned.... I only contend, that so

long as they insist on the word of the Lord, they are never so caught as to be led away to destruction, while their conviction of the truth of the word of God is so clear and certain, that it cannot be overthrown by either men or angels.

Thus the believers *must* have the Bible, Calvin insisted. He wrote to Sadolet that every believer is in a battle, with Satan coming at him to destroy him. And the Romish Church takes out of the believer's hand the one weapon that he needs—the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, so that the believer is at the mercy of Satan.

Luther exclaimed:

What punishment ought God to inflict upon such stupid and perverse people! Since we abandoned his Scriptures, it is not surprising that he has abandoned us to the teaching of the pope and to the lies of men. Instead of Holy Scripture we have had to learn the *Decretales* of a deceitful fool and an evil rogue. O would to God that among Christians the pure gospel were known and that most speedily there would be neither use nor need for this work of mine. Then there would surely be hope that the Holy Scriptures too would come forth again in their worthiness.

The quotations from Calvin and Luther could be multiplied many times. Scripture, and the believer's ability and right to interpret it, was a very dear truth to them. One last quotation from Calvin, one of many that could be quoted. This from the preface to the French translation.

And will all we men and women who carry the name of Christians nevertheless permit them to take away from us, hide, and corrupt this Testament, which so justly belongs to us, without which we cannot pretend to any rights in the kingdom of God, without which we are ignorant of the great benefits and promises Jesus Christ has given to us, and of the glory and blessedness he has prepared for us?¹³

All these convictions were written into the Reformation creeds.

13 Bernard Cottret, *Calvin, a Biography*, 91.

The Westminster insisted that the Bible ought to be translated in the language of the people (Chapter 1, section 8). The Scottish, Belgic, and other confessions taught that the Scriptures carry the evidence in themselves that they are the Word of God, and the believer knows they are, not so much because the church says so, but because the Spirit testifies in the hearts of all believers. Many confessions, including the Second Helvetic, affirmed that the Scriptures are sufficient, giving us all that we must know. Nearly all confessed that the Scriptures are the authority for faith and life. The same is true concerning the office of believer: all believers have the Spirit, and thus can read, interpret, and understand the Bible.

Importance for the church today

Believers ought to know this history. Specifically, we ought to know the zeal that the Reformation had for the Bible. We ought to know and grasp the point that all believers need the Bible. We ought to share the conviction that all believers have both the right and the ability to interpret it.

Exactly those heartfelt convictions would lead to the push in England to produce a translation of the Bible that is not only faithful (and translated out of the Hebrew and Greek), but beautiful and majestic. These convictions would give the English-speaking church the KJV.

We ought to know the history of the struggle for the Bible also because the church today faces the same battles that the Reformation faced—battles against Rome; against Charismatics of every stripe; against modern-day higher critics. The battle for the Bible continues.

Third, the church today ought to know this history in order to be reminded of the importance of this gift of the Word of God in our language. I fear that we do not compare well with the church of the Reformation; that we do not know the Bible, or esteem it, or have a zeal for it as the Reformation did. Thus let us encourage and admonish one another. Recognize what a precious thing is Holy Scripture. It is vital for our faith, for a godly walk, and for the battle of faith. Give thanks for the Bible in our language. ●

‘Ere Many Years, the Boy that Driveth the Plow...’: The History of the King James Version

Ronald Cammenga

Introduction

The story of the King James Bible is the story of a king, a conference, and a committee. The king was James I, who had just ascended the throne of England. James had been the king of Scotland as James VI. But when Queen Elizabeth died after reigning for nearly half a century, James was next in line to the throne of England. (For the smug satisfaction of those who like to keep track of such things, James was Elizabeth’s first cousin, twice removed.) James VI of Scotland became James I, king of England, in 1603. Elizabeth was the last monarch of the House of Tudor; James I was the first monarch of the House of Stuart.

The conference took place in the palace, at Hampton Court, about fifteen miles southwest of London on a bend in the River Thames. The conference was originally scheduled for November 1603, but an outbreak of the plague forced a postponement until January 1604. The king, James I, presided over the conference. The purpose of the conference was to hear complaints of the Puritans, a conservative party within the Church of England who were convinced that the Reformation of the Church of England had not gone far enough. The Puritans felt that the Church of England was too much like the Roman Catholic Church in its practices and teachings.

The outcome of the Hampton Court Conference was the decision to appoint a committee to produce a new English translation of the Bible. In the next seven years, from 1604-1611, the committee, really six separate committees, labored over the text of the Old Testament, the Apocrypha, and the New Testament. The fruit of the work of

the committees was the King James Version of the Bible, one of the most influential Bible translations of all time, and certainly *the* most influential Bible translation in the English language.

It is the anniversary of the publication of this Bible that we celebrate at this conference.

But in the end, the story of the King James Bible is not the story of a king, a conference, or a committee; it is the story of the amazing providence of God.

It is the story of God's wonderful care for His church, particularly His English-speaking church. It is the story of God's provision of His Word for the faith that is able to make one wise unto salvation, and "for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God [and the woman and young person and child] may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works" (II Tim. 3:15-17). It is the story of God's giving of His Word in such a way that it may serve as a "light shining in a dark place until the day dawn and the day star, which is Jesus Christ, arise in your hearts" (II Pet. 1:19).

The Protestant Reformed Churches join those who are celebrating the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version of the Bible. Our celebration of the KJV's quatercentenary is a thankful celebration; we are thankful to God. We celebrate the King James Bible because it is the version that these churches use in public worship, in the seminary, for family and personal devotions, in our schools, on the mission field, and at consistory meetings, classis, synod, and so many other functions.

In that respect our celebration of the 400th anniversary of the KJV differs from so many other celebrations. There are many celebrations that have taken place, and some that will yet take place, at which the King James Bible is praised for its literary and historical value. The KJV and Shakespeare's plays are often regarded as the twin pillars of the "golden age" of English literature. It is pointed out that they have done more to develop the English language than anything written after them. Together they added hundreds of words and expressions to the English language. Many fine things are said about the KJV. It is acclaimed as the "noblest monument of English prose."

But these celebrations—not all of them, but many of them—are a bit like the building of the tombs of the prophets and the garnishing of the sepulchers of the righteous by the scribes and Pharisees of Jesus’ day. For these are often the same people who have jettisoned the KJV from their churches, who have harsh things to say about the practical usefulness of the KJV, and who years ago already have replaced the KJV with one or more of the modern versions.

The Protestant Reformed Churches and the Protestant Reformed Seminary celebrate the anniversary of the publication of the King James Bible because we are genuinely thankful to God for this Bible, because we use this Bible, and because we regard this Bible as the best translation of the Bible in the English language.

History/Genealogy of the English Bible

The King James Version was not the first English Bible; rather, the KJV was the culmination of a fairly long line of English Bibles. It is dependent on those earlier Bibles for much of its language and for a good number of memorable expressions. Long before committees were meeting in the comfort of church and university facilities, Englishmen who first strove to have a Bible in their own language faced resistance—strong resistance—by crown and church alike. Of necessity, many of the early English translations of the Bible were produced outside of England. Many of these Bibles were confiscated and burned when they were found on English soil. Some of those who produced them, smuggled them, or read them were martyred when caught by the authorities. The history leading up to the King James Bible is the history of scholars and churchmen “who laid their gifts and graces [their very lives] on the altar” for the translation and dissemination of the Holy Scriptures in English.¹

The history of the English Bible begins with John Wyclif (ca. 1320-1384), a pre-Reformer fondly remembered as “the morning star of the Reformation.”

Wyclif taught at Oxford University, although he was eventually driven from his post by his enemies. More than once he was sum-

1 William Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible* (London, England: Morgan and Scott, 1911), 53.

moned by church authorities to answer charges that had been brought against him for his teachings. Papal authorities demanded that the university, the church, and the king apprehend Wyclif and hand him over for trial. But Wyclif always was dismissed with warnings and was never taken off English soil by papal envoys.

Wyclif is rightly remembered as the morning star of the Reformation inasmuch as he stood for all the key doctrines of the Reformation nearly two centuries before the Reformation. He was critical of the papacy and the immorality, ignorance, and sloth of the clergy. He was a champion of the “open Bible.” In 1378 he published a work entitled *On the Truth of Sacred Scripture (De Veritate Sacrae Scripturae)*. The four parts of the book are: “The Veracity of Scripture,” “The Authority of Scripture,” “The Divine Origin of Scripture,” and “Scripture as the Law of Christendom.” He taught that Scripture is from God and is the Word of God. He taught that the visible church, “in all its parts, powers, and persons,” is to be subject to Scripture alone. Scripture contains all that is necessary for the salvation of men and the worship of the church. And a true shepherd of Christians will be one who feeds his flock on the Word of God.²

Wyclif wrote: “To be ignorant of the Scripture is the same thing as to be ignorant of Christ. In the Bible is the salvation of men contained.” Furthermore, “a true shepherd of Christians [is] one who feeds his flock on the Word of God.”³ This demanded that the Bible be translated into English, so that Wyclif’s countrymen might have the Bible in their own tongue. Latin homilies based on a Latin Bible, accompanied by sacraments administered in Latin, would not suffice. English-speaking people must have an English Bible and must be instructed in the gospel out of an English Bible.

Wyclif is remembered for sending out men known as the Lollards, a term that may mean “Psalm-singers.” The Lollards were the “poor preachers” who went out two-by-two from place to place preaching out of the Wyclif Bible. The Wyclif Bible was very expensive. No ordinary laymen owned his own copy to read and study. The greatest

2 C.P. Hallihan, *The Authorized Version: A Wonderful and Unfinished History* (London, England: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010), 21.

3 Ibid., 22.

circulation was by means of oral readings and exposition from the Wyclif Bible by the traveling Lollards. Many of the Lollards suffered persecution and were burned as heretics. In later times, when Roman Catholic monarchs occupied England's throne, to be guilty of "Lollardy," that is, sympathy with Lollard teaching, was a death-sentence.

As a champion of the open Bible, Wyclif was concerned to put into the hands of his countrymen a Bible in their own language. No such Bible existed; the church's Bible was the Vulgate, a Latin translation by the church father Jerome. For nearly one thousand years, that had been *the* Bible in the church, for all practical purposes. No one had the Bible in their own language; there was only one Bible in the church of the Middle Ages. Wyclif was determined to change that.

In 1380 Wyclif completed his translation of the New Testament, and in 1382, just two years before his death, Wyclif completed the *first English translation* of the *whole* Bible. Wyclif was assisted in translating the Old Testament by Nicholas of Hereford, one of his colleagues at Oxford, and by John Purvey, Wyclif's secretary. Wyclif's translation, however, was not based on the Hebrew and Greek originals, but based rather on Jerome's Latin Vulgate. Each copy was hand-written, a meticulous and time-consuming task. It took about ten months to produce a single Wyclif Bible. Although that made the cost of a Wyclif Bible very expensive, the demand far exceeded the supply. Included in the translation were marginal notes and forewords to various books of the Bible that sharply criticized the Roman Catholic Church.

Immediately the Wycliffe Bible was banned by both church and state. A convocation of English bishops held in Oxford in 1408 condemned Wyclif's translation and decreed that anyone caught owning or reading it should be burned. Papal decrees in 1413 and 1414 banned Wyclif's writings, especially his English Bible. The Council of Constance, in 1415, besides condemning and burning John Hus, ordered Wyclif's books burned, and his bones exhumed and burned.

Notwithstanding, the demand for Wyclif's Bible far exceeded the copies that could be made. There were always those willing to take the risks involved in owning or borrowing a copy to read. We know

that in at least one instance a farmer was willing to borrow a Wyclif Bible for one hour in exchange for a wagon-load of hay. William Muir writes:

Touching stories are told of how the people used to gather to hear someone read...the Word of God in their own speech; and it is not possible to estimate how much this first English Bible must have done to keep the fire burning on the altar in those dark, and in some respects darkening ages. It had been written for the common people, and they heard it gladly....⁴

C.P. Hallihan notes a troubling consequence to the fact that now, at long last, the English people had a Bible in their own language.

There was [however] a very dark side to this work, as men in terror for their lives recanted, some becoming accusers, denouncers, and persecutors of their former Lollard companions and Wycliffe's teachings. Nevertheless, in England now the sure Word was heard in a familiar tongue: men began to give heed as to a light that shineth in a dark place.⁵

Despite this dark side, a light had begun to shine in England that could not be extinguished.

A couple of familiar expressions in the KJV have come down to us from Wyclif's Bible. For example, "Strait is the gate and narrow is the way" (Matt. 7:14), and the "mote" and the "beam" in Matthew 7:4 come down to us from Wyclif.

William Tyndale

After John Wyclif, over a century passed until the next major contribution was made to the English translation of the Bible. That contribution was made by William Tyndale (ca. 1494-1536), who was born about 100 years after Wyclif's death. More than anyone else, Tyndale is the champion of English Bible translation.

Between Wyclif's Bible and Tyndale's Bible, one of the most sig-

4 William Muir, *Our Grand Old Bible*, 26.

5 C.P. Hallihan, *The Authorized Version*, 23.

nificant inventions for the spread of the teachings of the Reformation came to be: the printing press. The German Johannes Gutenberg is generally credited with inventing the printing press around 1440. The very first thing that Gutenberg printed was the Latin Bible, an edition of the Vulgate known as the Gutenberg Bible. Now Bibles did not have to be hand-copied, a time-consuming process, but they could be mass-produced on the printing press.

Although the printing press had been invented by the time that Tyndale did his work, no English printer dared to print the Bible in England. It was not until shortly after Tyndale's death that an English Bible was printed in England. That would be the result of the edict of King Henry VIII severing ties with the Roman Catholic papacy, an edict that assured a change in favor of those who were interested in putting an affordable Bible into the hands of the English people.

As a student, Tyndale distinguished himself both at Oxford and at Cambridge. He was a gifted linguist, and over the years became fluent in French, German, Italian, Spanish, Latin, as well as the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek.

Early in his life, Tyndale embraced the great doctrines of the Reformation. Although he was an accomplished scholar, he was never given the opportunity to teach at a university. Like Wyclif before him, Tyndale championed the open Bible and gave himself passionately to translating the Bible into English, what one writer calls "his desire and his demise."⁶ John Foxe, in his *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, describes an argument that Tyndale had with a "learned" but "blasphemous" clergyman, who had asserted that "We had better to be without God's law than the Pope's." In righteous anger Tyndale responded: "I defy the Pope, and all his laws, and if God spares my life, ere many years I will cause the boy that driveth the plow to know more of the Scriptures than thou dost."⁷ It was a prophecy expressing how widely Tyndale wanted to see the Bible translated. And it was a prophecy expressing the large amount of Scripture that Tyndale wanted the people to know:

6 Laurence M. Vance, *King James, His Bible, and Its Translators* (Pensacola, FL: Vance Publications, 2006), 78.

7 John Foxe, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, repr. 1981), 138.

more of the Scriptures than the snippets that the priests knew and that were sufficient to get them through the celebration of the mass. Sadly, that prophecy of Tyndale did not come to pass in his lifetime or in his own translation of the Bible. But it was a prophecy that came to pass “ere many years” in the King James Bible.

Like so many others in his day, Tyndale was a Reformer on the run. For this reason he earned the title “God’s outlaw.” In 1524 he was forced to flee his homeland, never to see it again. He was hunted by agents of the pope, the emperor, and the English King Henry VIII. He never took a wife or owned his own home. Often he assumed a pseudonym: William Hutchins, or William Daltin (the reverse of the syllables in Tyndale). Tyndale eventually fled to Germany, where he visited Martin Luther in Wittenberg. There, aided by another English exile, William Roy, he set himself to the demanding work of translating Scripture into English.

It was in Germany that Tyndale published his English New Testament. Early in 1525 a printer at Cologne began the work, but midway through the project the authorities raided the print shop. Tyndale himself escaped to Worms, where a printer named Peter Schaeffer printed 6,000 copies of Tyndale’s English New Testament. There he had the support of a group of entrepreneurs who knew the market that there was in England, not only for the writings of the Reformers, but a Bible translated into their own language.⁸ Although banned in England, many copies of Tyndale’s New Testament were smuggled into the country. By 1530-31, Tyndale had translated the Pentateuch and Jonah, which were also published. But most of Tyndale’s time was spent revising his earlier translation of the New Testament. Still on the run, Tyndale settled for a time in Antwerp, considered a “free city,” a city open to both Roman Catholics and Protestants. But in 1535 Tyndale was discovered, betrayed by a friend, arrested, and under cover of darkness taken to the Castle of Vilvorde, a prison fortress near Brussels. We have a surviving letter that Tyndale wrote from prison.⁹ In the letter he requests permission to be allowed the use of

⁸ Derek Wilson, *The People’s Bible: The Remarkable History of the King James Bible* (Oxford, England: Lion Hudson, 2010), 38.

⁹ Derek Wilson, *The People’s Bible*, 45.

his Hebrew Bible, his Hebrew Grammar, and his Hebrew Lexicon that he may employ his time with study.

On October 6, 1536, at age 42, after exactly 500 days in prison, Tyndale was strangled to death and his body burned at the stake. According to John Foxe in his *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Tyndale's last words were a prayer heard by all who had gathered to witness his burning: "Lord! open the King of England's eyes."¹⁰

Tyndale's translation is of great significance. Though only the New Testament was complete, it was the first *printed* English Bible. Tyndale's translation is also significant because it was a translation based on the original languages, the Hebrew and the Greek.

All future translators would stand on the shoulders of Tyndale. There would be a great dependence of future translators on the work of Tyndale, including the translators of the KJV. It would prove impossible for later translators to improve on many of his renderings, which would appear in translation after translation. It is estimated that fully 80% of the King James New Testament is Tyndale's New Testament. Although King James would receive credit for the new Bible published in 1611, the reality is that the new Bible was more Tyndale's Bible than King James' Bible. In the end, Tyndale was to the English Bible what Luther was to the German Bible.

It is also significant that the King James is a martyr's Bible. They who use the KJV ought not to forget that. Many of those who translated the English Bible prior to 1611 paid a great price for their endeavors, some making the ultimate sacrifice. That was true of William Tyndale. Those who read and use the fruit of his labors in the KJV ought not to forget that. For Tyndale the reading and study of God's Word was no mere academic exercise. He was a churchman, devoted to the task of putting God's Word into the hands of the members of the church, the ordinary believer. Under God's blessing, his death would not be in vain and his work would live on.

The Coverdale Bible

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) was an Augustinian monk who was

¹⁰ Foxe, *Book of Martyrs*, 152.

ordained a priest in 1514, at the age of twenty-seven, just three years before Luther nailed his theses on the chapel door in Wittenburg. Erasmus was at Cambridge from 1511 to 1514, so that it is possible that Coverdale had firsthand knowledge of Erasmus' appeal to the authority of Scripture and his sharp criticism of abuses in the Roman Catholic Church. After Tyndale's death, Coverdale carried forward his work of Bible translation.

The Coverdale Bible was published in 1535, at either Marburg or Zurich. In his translation, Coverdale relied heavily on Tyndale's version, as well as consulting Luther's German Bible and the Latin Vulgate, along with other translations, including the Dutch. Coverdale did not know the biblical languages, so he could not have consulted the Hebrew or Greek. Although Coverdale published his first edition on the Continent, he dedicated his translation to Henry VIII, king of England, an indication that the official attitude towards a translation of the Bible into English was changing.

The second edition of Coverdale's Bible was printed in 1537, the first English Bible to be printed on English soil. By this time the general mood of the English authorities favored an official English Bible. Henry VIII himself licensed and authorized it. This second edition is sometimes referred to as the "Bug Bible" for its rendering of Psalm 91:5: "Thou shalt not need to be afraid for any 'bugges' by night." ("Bug" carried the idea of "bugaboo" or "bogey," an imaginary object of fear.)

Besides producing his own translation, Coverdale also edited the Great Bible of 1539 and had some part in the preparation of the Geneva Bible, published in 1560.

As far as the significance of Coverdale's work is concerned, his Bible is the first *complete* English Bible printed *in* England. Coverdale's Bible is precedent-setting in one important respect: up until this point, the Apocryphal books had not only been included in English Bible translations, but they had been scattered throughout the Old Testament according to the Roman Catholic arrangement of the books. In Coverdale's Bible they were collected and placed as a group between the Old and New Testaments. Why the change? The change reflected the conviction of the Reformers that the Apocryphal

books were uninspired and non-canonical and were, therefore, of secondary importance. Coverdale wrote in his introduction to these books:

The books and treatises, which among the fathers of old are not reckoned to be of like authority with the other books of the Bible, neither are they found in the Canon of the Hebrews.¹¹

The Matthew's Bible

In 1537 there appeared in Antwerp a new English version of the Bible bearing the title "The Bible, which is all the Holy Scripture: in which are contained the Old and New Testament, truly and purely translated into English by Thomas Matthew."

"Thomas Matthew" was a pseudonym, the pen-name of John Rogers, a close friend and assistant to William Tyndale. Before his death, Tyndale had given to Rogers his handwritten translation of Joshua through II Chronicles. Rogers slightly revised Coverdale's Bible, substituting Tyndale's translations of these Old Testament books, and published the new version.¹² Archbishop Cranmer was sufficiently impressed with the work to seek and obtain royal license from Henry VIII for its printing and sale in England. Sometimes the Matthew's Bible is referred to as the "Wife-Beater's Bible" because of a marginal note at I Peter 3, where the apostle instructs husbands how to treat their wives. The note reads: "If she be not obedient and helpful unto him, he endeavoreth to beat the fear of God into her head, that thereby she may be compelled to learn her duty, and to do it."

In 1539 Richard Taverner published a slightly revised edition of the Matthew's Bible that became known as the Taverner Bible. Taverner was a clerk in Cromwell's administration. Although Taverner's Bible is basically the Matthew's Bible, it did have some influence in the later work of translation. It is he who introduced in Hebrews 1:3 the state-

11 Donald Brake, *A Visual History of the King James Bible: The Dramatic Story of the World's Best-Known Translation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 56.

12 Hallihan, *The Authorized Version*, 35.

ment in reference to the Son of God that He is the "express image" of the Father. And for Tyndale's "similitude," he substituted "parable": Jesus spake unto the multitudes in "parables" (Matt. 13:2).

The Great Bible

Published in 1539, the Great Bible received the name from its dimensions: it was 16 ½ inches by 11 inches—a true pulpit Bible.

In 1538 Thomas Cromwell, the King's Vicar-General, commissioned Miles Coverdale the work of revising the Matthew's Bible, striking out the controversial marginal notes. The Great Bible, published in 1539, was the first English Bible authorized for *public* use in the English churches. Every church was ordered to purchase a copy and chain it in some convenient place in the church in order that parishioners might "resort to the same and read it." For this cause it was sometimes called the *Chained Bible*. Only three years after the martyrdom of Tyndale, there was an official English translation of Scripture in every English parish. And it was really Tyndale's work. For the Great Bible was simply a revision of the Matthew's Bible, which was only a minor revision of Tyndale's Bible. Truly, God's ways are above our ways.

A revised version of the Great Bible was issued in 1540, which included a preface by Archbishop Cranmer. For this reason it is sometimes referred to as Cranmer's Bible. In the instructions to the translators of the King James Bible it is referred to as Whitchurch's Bible, after the name of one of the printers. There were a number of subsequent editions of the Great Bible printed.

The Geneva Bible

Without question, the Bible that was of greatest influence among English-speaking people prior to the King James Bible was the Geneva Bible.

In 1553 King Edward VI's half-sister, Mary, succeeded him to the English throne and restored papal authority in England. "Bloody Mary," as she would soon become known, prohibited the reading of the English Bible and persecuted to the death those in sympathy with the cause of the Reformation. She burned at the

stake Hugh Latimer, Nicholas Ridley, John Hooper, Thomas Cranmer, John Rogers (editor of the Matthew's Bible), and many more. During Mary's reign of terror, thousands of Protestant Christians fled England.

Many of these Marian exiles took refuge in Calvin's Geneva, the Jerusalem of the Alps. Here, with the aid of scholars at the University of Geneva, leading English Protestants published a new English translation of the Bible in April 1560. William Gilbey, Thomas Sampson, John Knox, William Whittingham (Calvin's brother-in-law and Knox's successor at the English refugee church in Geneva), Miles Coverdale, and Theodore Beza all had a hand in producing the new translation. The translators dedicated the new Bible to Queen Elizabeth ("Good Queen Bess," as she would become known), who had by this time ascended the English throne and reversed the fortune of English Protestants. The Bible was supplied with fairly extensive marginal notes, which, besides explaining the text, also set forth and defended the distinctive doctrines of the Reformation.

The Geneva Bible was well received by English Protestants, especially the more conservative-minded Puritans. It became the household Bible of England's Protestants. For sixty years it was the most popular version in England and Scotland, as well as among English exiles throughout Europe. When the Pilgrims landed at Plymouth Rock on November 11, 1620 it was the Geneva Bible (not the KJV of 1611) that they brought with them to the New World. Even Shakespeare quoted in his works from the Geneva Bible. Its relatively small size made it portable and affordable. Its Roman typeface made it much easier to read than the black Gothic lettering that was used in previous translations.

As far as the significance of the Geneva Bible is concerned, Muir writes:

The Genevan Bible unquestionably stands next to the A.V. alike for its historical importance, and for its accuracy and scholarship. Among those who shared in its preparation were William Whittingham, whose New Testament has a place in the succession, Thomas Sampson, and

Anthony Gilbey, along with Cole, Goodman, Coverdale, and others, who, like Paul in the Roman prison and Luther in Wartburg, turned their enforced leisure to good account.¹³

The Geneva Bible was the first complete printed English Bible to be translated from the Hebrew and Greek. Second, it was the first English Bible to contain chapter and verse divisions. Third, it was the first English Bible to make use of italics. Words not found in the original, but added by the translators, were placed in italics. This device would be imitated in the KJV. It was the first English Bible to omit the apocrypha. Although the earlier editions of the Geneva Bible included the apocrypha, the 1640 edition did not include any of the apocryphal books. This was a reflection of the view of these books by the Reformation. And last, the Geneva Bible was the first really popular and affordable English Bible.

A few interesting editions of the Genevan Bible include: The Breeches Bible, so named because of the translation of Genesis 3:7, “They sewed fig-tree leaves together, and made them breeches”; The Judas Bible, so named for its mistranslation of John 6:67, “Then said *Judas* to the twelve, ‘Will ye also go away?’”; the Place-Makers Bible, so named for its rendering of Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the place-makers....”

The Bishops’ Bible

Last in the line of English Bibles prior to the King James Bible is the Bishops’ Bible. When Queen Elizabeth came to England’s throne in 1558, she appointed Matthew Parker Archbishop of Canterbury. At the bishops’ request, Parker agreed to commission a new official English translation to compete with the Geneva Bible. Parker and most of England’s bishops desired a version that would be free of the Calvinism promoted by so many of the notes in the Geneva Bible.¹⁴

The Bishops’ Bible was published in 1568. Like the Great Bible, it was produced by clerics in the Church of England under the oversight of Church of England officials. It was based on the Hebrew and Greek

13 Muir, 57.

14 Ibid.

originals. It was basically the text of the Great Bible, with the chapter and verse divisions of the Geneva Bible, but without the offensive marginal notes.

The Convocation of England's bishops ordered the Bishops' Bible to take the place of the Great Bible, and ordered that a copy of the new Bible should be placed in every church in England, as well as in the dining hall of every bishop, for use by his servants. The bishops knew very well that many of the servants favored the Geneva Bible. Despite the version in the church's pulpit, they continued to use the Geneva Bible in their own devotions. The bishops thought to change this practice. But in spite of their efforts, the Bishops' Bible never gained the popularity of the Geneva Bible. Even those who were enemies of the Puritans often acknowledged the superiority of the Geneva Bible, considered the Bible of the Puritans.¹⁵

The Douey-Rheims Bible

The Douey-Rheims Bible was the first Roman Catholic translation of the Bible in English. When English Roman Catholics fled England for the Continent under the reign of Queen Elizabeth, many settled in France. In 1568 an English college was established by William Allen (1532-1594) at Douey. The college was moved for a time to Rheims in 1578 under Richard Bristow (1538-1580). It was here that Gregory Martin (d. 1582) began translating the Bible into English from the Latin Vulgate. Allen recognized that English-speaking Roman Catholics had an unfair disadvantage compared to Protestants. They did not have a Bible in their own language, considering the official Roman Catholic position that all the English versions in existence were "most corrupt."

The Roman Catholic New Testament was finished in 1582, but the complete Old Testament was not finished until 1610-11. The significance of this first official Roman Catholic translation of the Bible into English is not only that at long last English Roman Catholics had their own translation of the Bible. The Douey-Rheims Bible is also of significance because it was one of the translations consulted by the translators of the KJV.

¹⁵ Ibid., 58.

The King James Bible

As John the Baptist was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus, all these English translations prepared the way for the King James Version.

When Queen Elizabeth died childless in 1604, James VI of Scotland became the king of England. He was the son of Mary Queen of Scots, cousin of Elizabeth, whom Elizabeth had executed. He became James I of England and began the Stuart line of English monarchs.

Under Elizabeth, the Church of England had assumed an Episcopal form of government. A growing number of Puritans (non-conformists) were dissatisfied with what they viewed as a “compromise” church. They desired the English church to be more consistently Reformed, like the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the Reformed Church in the Netherlands and Geneva. They wanted to “purify” the church of the vestiges of Roman Catholicism, including the hierarchical form of church government, clerical garb, rituals, and various Romish doctrines.

Hardly had James left Edinburgh for London in April 1603, than a delegation of Puritans presented him with what has become known as the Millenary Petition, so called because it was signed by about a thousand clergymen. The Petition was formally titled *The Humble Petition of the Ministers of the Church of England desiring Reformation of certain Ceremonies and abuses of the Church*. The Petition asked for changes in the Church of England and petitioned the new king to call a conference so that these changes could be discussed.¹⁶

James agreed to call a conference of Puritans and leaders in the Church of England. The purpose of the conference was: “For the hearing, and for determining things pretended to be amiss in the Church [of England].” The conference was convened at Hampton Court in January of 1604. Only four Puritan divines were invited to attend. They “[sat] on their bench more like the accused at a trial than the equal partners in a negotiation for the future of the church.”¹⁷ The leader of the Puritans was John Reynolds, the president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford. Along with Reynolds were Lawrence Chaderton

16 Brake, *Visual History of KJV*, 81.

17 Adam Nicolson, *God's Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2003), 44.

(master of Emmaus College, Cambridge); Thomas Sparke; and John Knewstuds.

From the point of view of the Puritans, the Hampton Court Conference was a disappointment and failure. Nothing really was accomplished in the way of further reformation of the Church of England. It became plain that James I did not sympathize with their cause, and was perfectly content with the status quo.

But one significant decision came out of the Hampton Court Conference, and that decision was to produce a new English translation of the Bible. The resolution passed by the assembly was: "That a translation be made of the whole Bible, as consonant as can be to the original Hebrew and Greek; and this to be set out and printed, without any marginal notes, and only to be used in all churches of England in time of divine service." The resolution was supported eagerly by the king, not because he was in favor of the Reformation. Undoubtedly it was partly because of his dislike of the Genevan Bible, especially its notes that he understood to challenge the divine right of kings. Mostly it was because of the possibility of recognition for himself.

By June 30, 1604, six months after the Hampton Court Conference, fifty-four men had been approved as translators of the new version, a group whom Nicolson refers to as "...a gaggle of fifty or so black-gowned divines whose names are almost unknown but whose words continue to resonate with us."¹⁸ In the end, forty-seven actually participated in the work. Bishop Richard Bancroft, Archbishop of Canterbury, was entrusted with the general supervision of the project.

The translators were divided into six panels: two meeting at Westminster Abbey, two at Cambridge University, and two at Oxford University. Genesis through II Kings was translated by the first Westminster panel. I Chronicles through Ecclesiastes was translated by the first Cambridge panel. And Isaiah through Malachi was translated by the first Oxford panel. The second Oxford panel translated the four Gospel accounts, Acts, and Revelation. The second Westminster panel translated Romans through Jude. And the second Cambridge

18 Nicolson, *God's Secretaries*, Preface, xi.

company translated the Apocrypha, although the Apocrypha was not considered part of the Canon.

Each scholar on a panel did his own work of translating a given passage, and all the individual renderings were discussed by the panel as a whole until agreement could be reached. When a panel finished an entire book, it sent the translation to the other five panels for criticism and approval. Finally the draft translations were submitted to a group of twelve composed of two representatives from each panel. The work was begun in earnest by mid-1607, and finally finished some four years later in 1611.

The Rules for Translation

All the committees that worked on the KJV were guided by a set of guidelines known as the *Rules to Be Observed in the Translation of the Bible*. These rules were composed by the king and the powerful archbishop of Canterbury, Richard Bancroft.¹⁹

Rule 1. The ordinary Bible read in the church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.

In light of the fact that the Bishops' Bible was the authorized version at this point, it is not surprising that it should be the model for the new version. As a matter of fact, Tyndale's New Testament and the Geneva Bible were the versions most preferred by the KJV translators. Brake points out that this rule forced the use of the archaic personal pronouns not found in the Geneva Bible but found in the Bishops' Bible: *thee* and *thou* for the second person singular, and *ye* for the second person plural. The popular form *you* was found in the Geneva Bible.

Rule 2. The names of the prophets, and the holy writers, with the other names of the text, to be retained, as nigh as may be, accordingly as they were vulgarly used.

19 Muir, *Grand Old Bible*, 95ff. See also Brake, *Visual History of KJV*, 115ff. and Wilson, *People's Bible*, 87ff.

With regard to this rule, Muir comments:

In this respect the example of the Geneva version was not followed, which was well. Perhaps, indeed, it was the Genevan mode of spelling proper names which led to this rule being laid down. For instead of adhering to the usual English forms, that version sought to copy the original as closely as possible. Hence Rahel for Rachel; Heuah for Eve; and such strange names as Iaakob, Ishhak, and the like. It would have been well, however, had our translators made the names uniform in the Old Testament and the New. There seems to be no good reason why Elisha should reappear in the New Testament as Eliseus, Noah as Noe, or Korah as Core.²⁰

Rule 3. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz., the word *church* not to be translated *congregation*, etc.

The introduction to the KJV refers to the rejection by the translators of the KJV of the practice of translating used by the Puritans in the Geneva Bible: “Lastly, we have ... avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other, as when they put ‘washing’ for ‘Baptism’ and ‘congregation’ instead of ‘Church.’” The Puritans believed that this translation principle favored the Roman Catholic view by translating *presbyteros* as *priest* rather than *elder*, and *ecclesia* as *church* rather than as *congregation*.

Rule 4. When a word hath divers significations, that to be kept which hath been most commonly used by the most of the ancient fathers, being agreeable to the propriety of the place and the analogy of faith.

This rule simply requires of the translators that they honor the authority of the ancient writers who have gone before them in their translation of the Hebrew and Greek text. They were to ascertain the exact meaning of the text, that is, their translation was to be a literal equivalence translation. But after they had determined the exact meaning of the text, the question remained how best to convey the meaning in English.

²⁰ Ibid., 97.

In the search for the best word(s), regard was to be paid to tradition and the analogy of faith.

Rule 5. The divisions of the chapters to be altered, either not at all, or as little as may be, if necessity so require.

The KJV was to continue the chapter divisions used by the Bishops' Bible and the earlier English Bible versions. The possibility for adjustment was left open, but this was to be done only if absolutely necessary. That necessity, quite obviously, would have to do with the continuation of a narrative or the continuation of an argument.

Rule 6. No marginal notes at all to be affixed, but only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text.

This was the main criticism of the Geneva Bible by both the king and the high church Anglicans. The king objected to certain notes that he interpreted to deny the divine right of kings, notes that justified disobedience to the king under certain circumstances. Certain of the bishops objected to the Calvinism promoted in the notes. The King James Version was to have no notes, except those necessary to explain an obscurity in the text.

Rule 7. Such quotations of places to be marginally set down, as shall serve for a fit reference of one Scripture to another.

This rule is based on the Reformation's principle that Scripture interprets Scripture. It also recognizes the truth that the New Testament is to be understood in light of the Old Testament. Old Testament prophecy is fulfilled in the New Testament and the New Testament contains quotations out of the Old Testament. When such is the case, this was to be noted in the margin.

Rule 8. Every particular man of each company, to take the same chapter or chapters, and having translated or amended them severally by himself, where he thinketh good, all to meet together, confer what they have done, and agree for their parts what shall stand.

This rule lays down the manner in which the committees and each committee was to carry out the work of translation. The KJV would be a translation altogether different from all previous translations. Each member of each committee worked out his own translation of a given passage on his own, without consultation with anyone else on his committee. The committee would then meet and compare translations, and after comparing decide on the best translation. The KJV would be a joint endeavor.

Rule 9. As any one company hath dispatch any one book in this manner, they shall send it to the rest, to be considered by them seriously and judiciously, for His Majesty is very careful in this point.

Whereas Rule 8 concerns operations within each committee, Rule 9 concerns operations between the various committees. Each company was subject to the inspection of every other company—mutual supervision. We know that reviews were sent to the king after each book was finished.²¹ James, it seems, was particularly concerned that the Puritans not unduly influence the translation.

Rule 10. If any company, upon the review of the book so sent, doubt or differ upon any place, to send them word thereof, note the place, and withal send the reasons; to which if they consent not, the difference to be compounded at a general meeting, which is to be of the chief persons of each company at the end of the work.

Rule 11. When any place of special obscurity is doubted of, letters to be directed by authority, to send to any learned man in the land for his judgement of such a place.

These rules, too, further indicate how difficulties in the work of translation were to be dealt with. They deal with two matters, in particular, the matters of disagreement and obscurity. The KJV translators were all scholars, and yet at every level their work was checked and re-checked. All their work was subject to the review of their peers. And if there were unresolved differences or a translation

21 Brake, *Visual History of KJV*, 120.

was unsatisfactory, any scholar throughout the land could be consulted. The goal was the best possible translation.

Rule 12. Letters to be sent from every bishop to the rest of his clergy, admonishing them of this translation in hand, and to move and charge as many as, being skilful in tongues, and having taken pains in that kind, to send his particular observations to the company, either at Westminster, Cambridge, or Oxford.

Rule 13. The directors in each company to be deans of Westminster and Chester for that place, and the King's professors in Hebrew and Greek in either University.

The translators were encouraged to send their translations to other clergy for their scrutiny and suggestions, especially those "skilful in the tongues," that is, skillful in the biblical languages. Since the king controlled the appointments of the university deans, it was assured that those whom he had appointed and were in sympathy with his views would chair each of the committees.

Rule 14. These translations to be used when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible: Tyndale's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's [Great Bible], and Geneva.

This rule recognized the ancestors of the KJV and the noble line of English translations that now gave birth to the KJV. In spite of the king's antipathy towards the Geneva Bible, it was given a prominent place as the translators went about their work. Although the Roman Douay-Rheims Bible is not mentioned, we know that it too was consulted.

Rule 15. Besides the said directors before mentioned, three or four of the most ancient and grave divines, in either of the universities (Oxford or Cambridge), not employed in translating, to be assigned by the vice-chancellor, upon conference with rest of the heads, to be overseers of the translations as well Hebrew as Greek, for the better observation of the fourth rule above specified.

Once again, the committees were encouraged to take advantage of

the advice and input of every expert in the biblical languages throughout the realm. The aim was the best possible translation, a translation that would endure.

Publication of the KJV

The first editions of the KJV were published in London by the royal printer Robert Barker, who had also provided financial support for the translation project. The title page was designed by the Antwerp engraver Cornelius Bol (or Boel) and read: “The Holy Bible, containing the Old Testament and the new: newly translated out of the original tongues: and with the former translations diligently compared and revised, by his Majesty’s special commandment. Appointed to be read in the Churches.”

Three things of note with regard to this statement on the title page. First, the KJV, like Tyndale’s version, is based on the original languages, the Hebrew Old Testament and the Greek New Testament. The Greek New Testament editions of Erasmus, Stephanus, and Beza were available to the committees.

Second, the KJV translators made use of former versions that gave them a basis for comparison and revision. This includes the earlier English versions: Wyclif, Tyndale, Coverdale, Geneva Bible, Bishops’ Bible, and even the Douay-Rheims version. But included also were the Latin Vulgate, and the Latin translation of Pagninus, Tremellius, and Beza, as well as the latest French, Spanish, Italian, German, and Dutch translations. Also included were the Complutensian and Antwerp Polyglots.

Third, the title page states that the translators did their work “by his Majesty’s special commandment” and that the new translation was “appointed to be read in the churches.” This indicates that the King formally approved the new version. Accordingly, the King James Version has often been referred to as the Authorized Version (A.V.).

The new version was not without its critics. There remained for some time a preference among many of the common people for the Geneva Bible, as is evident from the fact that it was this translation that the Pilgrims carried with them when they disembarked from the Mayflower in 1620.

One of the more outspoken critics of the KJV was the Hebrew scholar Dr. Hugh Broughton. Some suggest that his criticism was occasioned by his being slighted to work on the new translation project. Be that as it may, he wrote:

The late Bible... was sent to me to censure; which bred in me a sadness that will grieve me while I breathe, it is so ill done. Tell His Majesty that I had rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches.... The new edition crosseth me. I require it to be burnt.²²

Notwithstanding its critics, however, the KJV in short order replaced the other existing English versions and became the Bible of the people.

A few words as far as successive editions are concerned. There were three editions that appeared in quick succession in the first year of its publication, 1611. The first was known as the “Great He Bible,” and the other two as the “Great She Bibles.” This was due to the change in translation of the reading of the pronoun at the end of Ruth 3:15. The issue is whether the pronoun refers to Boaz or to Ruth as the one who returned to the city. The first edition also translated Mark 10:18, “There is *no man* good, but *one*, that is God.” Later editions changed “no man” to “none.”

Two more editions were published in 1612 with minor revisions.

Some rather famous editions include the following:

- ◆ The “Wicked Bible,” published in 1631. In this edition the word “not” was omitted from the Seventh Commandment in Exodus 20:14. The King’s printers were fined £300 by Archbishop Laud for this scandalous blunder.
- ◆ The “Unrighteous Bible,” published in 1653, so called because of the misprint in I Corinthians 6:9, “The unrighteous shall inherit the kingdom of God.”
- ◆ The Oxford edition of 1717 was known as the “Vinegar Bible,” because the chapter-heading to Luke 20 read “vinegar” for “vineyard” in the title, “The Parable of the Vineyard.”

²² Nicolson, *God’s Secretaries*, 228.

◆ The Oxford edition of 1795 became known as the “Murderers’ Bible” because Mark 7:27 was made to read, “Let the children first be killed [instead of filled].”

◆ Perhaps a “Freudian slip” was the error introduced by a careless typesetter who made Psalm 119:161 read, “Printers (should be “Princes”) have persecuted me without a cause!”

This is the Bible version, now, that has held sway among English-speaking peoples for over four hundred years. It is the translation that after four hundred years continues to be used both in private and in public worship. Four hundred years of reading an accurate and clear translation. Four hundred years in which God has revealed Himself and the gospel of sovereign, particular, efficacious grace in His Son, the Word become flesh, the Lord Jesus Christ. That is quite amazing! It is inconceivable that any of the contemporary translations will so establish themselves in the life of the English-speaking church as to become the one version used for the next four hundred years. No contemporary version has the possibility of doing what the King James Version has done.

In the language of the “Translators to the Reader,” the Preface to the King James Version, it is a “Translation...that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water....”

The KJV translators were capable translators of Holy Scripture. They were scholars, the most capable scholars of the original languages of Scripture that could be found. For the most part, they were men of God, churchmen who had a genuine interest in the welfare of God’s church. And they were men who, to a man, honored Scripture as the Word of God, divinely inspired, infallible, and authoritative over faith and life.

In the “Preface” they affirm that Scripture in translation *is* the very Word of God:

...we affirm and avow, that the very meanest translation of the Bible in English set forth by men of our profession...containeth the Word of God, nay, is the Word of God: as the King's speech which he uttereth in Parliament, being translated into French, Dutch, Italian, and Latin, is still the King's speech, though it be not interpreted by every translator with the like grace, nor peradventure so fitly for phrase, nor so expressly for sense, everywhere.

This is the version that has come to be used in the Protestant Reformed Churches. So far as I know, no synodical decision was ever taken officially adopting the King James Version as the version to be used in public worship or in the assemblies. It was simply natural that the KJV came to be used by the PRC. At the time of the organization of the PRC in the early 1920s the KJV was for all practical purposes the Bible of conservative-minded English speaking Christians. At the time there was really only one other rival English translation, the Revised Standard Version. Most conservative Christians, for good reason, chose the KJV over the RSV. The plethora of versions that exist today was not then a reality. The KJV was, for the most part, uncontested as *the* English Bible among Reformed believers.

Alongside the KJV the Dutch Bible was used by a good number of our founding members, the first generation in the PRCA. The Dutch *Staten Vertaling*, the Dutch Bible commissioned by the Synod of Dordt in 1618 was in use. It was the version found in the homes where an effort was made to preserve Dutch speaking. And it was used in the Dutch worship services that were held. But from the outset, the English Bible was the King James Bible.

It is that Bible that has been a source of tremendous blessing throughout the history of our churches. This is the Bible that we are presently using and that we will continue to use in the foreseeable future. May we use it thankfully—thankful to those who have gone before, who have made the sacrifices, the painful sacrifices so that we may have a Bible in our language, a clear and understandable Bible in our language; thankful to God who for us and our salvation has preserved His Word throughout time and will preserve it to the very end.

I want to close with the last words of the “Preface” to the King James Bible:

Ye are brought unto fountains of living water which ye digged not: do not cast earth into them, with the Philistines, neither prefer broken pits before them, with the wicked Jews. Others have labored, and you may enter into their labours. O receive not so great things in vain: O despise not so great salvation. Be not like swine to tread under foot so precious things, neither yet like gods to tear and abuse holy things. Say not to our Saviour with the Gergesites, Depart out of our coasts: neither yet with Esau sell your birthright for a mess of pottage. If light be come into the world, love not darkness more than light: if food, if clothing, be offered, go not naked, starve not yourselves.... They that despise God’s will inviting them shall feel God’s will taking vengeance of them. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when He setteth His Word before us, to read it, when He stretcheth out His hand and calleth, to answer, Here am I, here we are to do thy will, O God. The Lord work a care and conscience in us to know Him and serve Him, that we may be acknowledged of Him at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost be all praise and thanksgiving. Amen. ●

A Critical Analysis of the KJV and Some Modern English Translations¹

Barrett L. Gritters

Introductory Comments

To assess critically the English translations of the Bible other than the King James Version (KJV or AV) is a dizzying task. It is not unlike attempting to explain to a driver of Mercedes S Class cars the strengths and weaknesses of every other make and model of cars, in 45 minutes; or trying to tell a young man who has just become engaged to be married the strengths and weaknesses of 100 other young ladies in the world. Is he interested? Should he be?

According to my estimates, there are approximately 150 modern (from 1800 to today) *English* translations of the Bible. That estimate does not include the partial translations, or the annual revisions of many of these translations.

My study of this subject in the 400th anniversary year of the KJV has turned up a mountain of books and articles, both scholarly articles in journals and popular articles like those found in the Wall Street Journal. There are Internet sites devoted to the KJV anniversary, on-line lectures from a variety of organizations, and YouTube videos produced in commemoration of it. I have studied material in favor of the AV as well as opposed to the AV—ranging from fanatically supportive (see

1 This article is significantly different from the public lecture given in September and October 2011. The speech included only about one-third of this article; I include material that could not fit into a one-hour public lecture. It is also more formal in style in contrast to the popular style of a public speech. More importantly, it should be noted that the speech assumed an audience, the majority of whom were users of the King James Version.

below) to angrily opposed or haughtily dismissive.² One could spend years trying to read everything scholars and pundits have said about the KJV, and a lifetime reading about Bible-translating. An entire library could be built of books on the English Bible and its translations. Of the making of many books about the KJV there is no end.

What adds to the difficulty is the emotional and controversial nature of the subject. Any position one takes on the matter of Bible translation will be controversial. Probably I could add “Bible translation” to the duo of “money and music” as topics guaranteed to generate controversy in the church. To raise hackles, especially in some circles, propose another translation of the Bible.

My own thinking on the matter of the KJV over against other translations has evolved somewhat over the course of my studies this past summer. For the sake of full disclosure at the outset, the reader may know that as I read and gave careful thought to the matter, three things happened: First, my esteem and appreciation for the KJV, though never low (I have used it and only it all my life), has risen significantly. My gratitude to God for a good translation of the Bible (never little) is greater than it ever has been. Second, my understanding of the weaknesses of the other translations has deepened; as has my realization of the damage done by the multiplicity of translations. Third, my desire for an improved English version of the Bible that can be adopted by the churches has lessened; and my hopes that there ever will be one have diminished, as I understand the magnitude of the task.

Qualifications and Cautions

This “critical analysis of the KJV and some modern English versions” begins with qualifications and cautions. I begin here, because the subject is often weighed down with misunderstandings and overstatements, choked with shrill and angry voices, and rarely approached with anything like civility, and sometimes not even with

2 Even the atheist Christopher Hitchens blogged about the KJV, praising its prose, reading it as he did in his epic battle against cancer. See Albert Mohler’s blog at <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/04/07/rinse-not-the-prose-christopher-hitchens-on-the-king-james-version/> (accessed 9/23/11).

reason. The problem is not new. The shrill voices were heard when Luther approached the subject. The translators of the King James Version addressed the subject in their preface called the “Translators to the Readers.”³ Here, the translators lamented that they could find no one willing to entertain a new thing. Unlike the ecclesiastical climate today, when almost anything new is accepted merely because it is new, then most believed that anything new was evil. Especially suspect was a new English Bible translation. So, while one should not be surprised by the present atmosphere, I will try not to contribute to it, and thus will say more about *how* one makes assessment of modern Bible versions than I will offer assessments.

First, the Protestant Reformed seminary and the churches that maintain the school are not advocates of the “KJV-Only” position, a position that in varying degrees makes excessive claims about the King James Version.

“KJV-Only-ism,” for the most part, is not an organized movement, but a collection of like-minded individuals and organizations.⁴ The

3 This “preface” may be found in many of the older printings of the AV, but is not included in most of the newer printings. The preface was entitled “The Translators to the Readers” and followed the shorter dedication, “To the most high and mightee Prince, James....” This “Translators to the Reader” has been published separately, in an attractive and large format paperback book, *The Translators to the Reader: The Original Preface of the KING JAMES Version of 1611 Revisited* (edited by Dr. Erroll F. Rhodes and Dr. Liana Lupas. New York: American Bible Society, 1997). It offers the preface in three forms—a facsimile of the original 1611 edition; a form of the original with but adjustment of “orthography to modern American usage,” and a third form “oriented to the American reader” by translation of Greek and Hebrew and change of archaic words and idioms.

4 *Individuals* whose names are prominent in this movement include: Barry Burton, Mickey Carter, William Grady, Gail Riplinger, Peter Ruckman, and D.A. Waite. In this connection, it is necessary to mention the name of David Otis Fuller, identified by one as the “dean of the King James-Only movement.” Fuller, founder of Cornerstone University in Grand Rapids, also founded the Dean Burgon Society, which advocates the King James Version and the texts that lie behind the version. Fuller has been accused of

range of beliefs among the KJV-Only advocates, increasingly strict in their assertions about the AV, would include:

1. The KJV is not only the best translation of the Bible, but the *only* accurate translation.
2. The KJV is the only English translation of the Bible that God approves.
3. The KJV is divinely inspired, just as were the original Hebrew and Greek written by the apostles and prophets.⁵
4. The KJV must be used to correct the ancient Hebrew and Greek of the Bible.

misrepresenting Burgon, as well as plagiarizing the Seventh Day Adventist Benjamin Wilkinson, who really began the KJVO position. Some question whether Fuller should be included among the KJV-Only advocates. (Read more at kjvonly.org. “This website is dedicated to the defense of the Bible as originally written, against the flood of falsehood propagated by King James Onlyism.” Accessed September 3, 2011.) *Organizations* that have been associated with this movement include *BibleBelievers.com*, an organization of over 1000 churches, mostly independent Baptist, which have *subscribed* to the KJV-Only position. The Dean Burgon Society and the “The Trinitarian Bible Society” (TBS) are not to be put into this category. Both the TBS and the Dean Burgon Society deny that the AV is inspired, although in this writer’s judgment the Burgon Society has writers who incline to what might be judged “KJV-Onlyism.” The difference between the two could be put thus: the TBS regards the AV as the “best” English translation and will use only the KJV when distributing English Bibles; the Dean Burgon Society regards the AV as the “only accurate” English translation. The TBS says: “perfection is not claimed for the Authorised Version (known in some countries as the King James Version), or for any other version” (see the TBS web-site under “Principles”). The TBS’s new booklet by C.P. Hallihan, *The Authorized Version: A Wonderful and Unfinished Story* (London, 2010) has this note: “A blind following of certain ‘King James Version only’ advocates must ignore issues of Bible production outlined here, and brush aside the question seriously important for them...” (p. 56).

5 That some believe so explains why many KJV-Only advocates have written full-length papers defending the translation “easter” rather than “Passover” of τὸ Πάσχα in Acts 12:4, even though the other 28 times the word is used in the AV it is translated “Passover.”

5. There are divine revelations in the KJV that were not found in the original text of the Scripture.

6. No person can be saved unless he hears the gospel through the KJV.⁶

All other English versions of the Bible are satanic.⁷

One need only read the literature to know that even this is not the limit of where the position has taken some of its advocates. A plethora of books have been written controverting King James-Onlyism.⁸

The PRC seminary does not advocate a KJV-Only position, not even the most moderate of the above positions, although her practices may make it appear so. The churches use the KJV and only the KJV in public worship and in catechism instruction. No PRC pastor uses any other version in his pastoral labors. In the homes of most of her members, the AV is the version of choice. In the schools established by Protestant Reformed parents, as far as this writer knows, the KJV has pride of place. It is also true that the PRC seminary recently purchased the library of Theodore Letis, the NT scholar who defended the Textus Receptus as the proper Greek text to be used in translating

6 “Greek and Hebrew texts should be corrected according to the AV, and that a person cannot be truly saved unless it is through the AV” (quoted in Hallihan, 57, footnote 9).

7 It is claimed that the symbol of the front of Nelson’s New King James Version is a stylized form of 666, which proves that the NKJV is a Satanic version. See the article, for example, by Terry Watkins at <http://www.av1611.org/nkjv.html> (accessed October 1, 2011).

8 One author says “hundreds of volumes have been published on the subject in the past thirty years.” Some of the more recent include: *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (by D. A. Carson, Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979); *The King James Only Controversy: Can you Trust the Modern Translations?* (by James R. White, Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1995); *One Bible Only? Examining Exclusive Claims for the King James Bible* (Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder, eds., Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2001); *The Unbound Scriptures: A Review of KJV-only Claims and Publications* (Rick Norris, Fayetteville: Unbound Scripture Publications, 2003). Briefer treatment may be found in Gordon Campbell’s, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 264-268).

the New Testament. It is this “received text” that stands behind the KJV, and not the newer versions.⁹ Besides that, the PRC seminary sponsored a major conference commemorating the 400th anniversary of this translation of the Bible. Then, a steadfast refusal to give an inch to the modern, snide put-downs of the AV—so many, spoken with such confidence that multitudes believe them and repeat them—may be all that is needed to convince one that the PRC puts herself in the “KJV-Only” camp. But the PRC and her seminary are not.¹⁰

The PRC declines membership in the KJV-Only club because God did not inspire the KJV or the translators. Rather, God inspired the original writers, and then preserved the Bible in those original languages so that we have word for word the word of God.¹¹ But the KJV is not inspired or inerrant. Second, in that connection, language changes; and it is not only permissible but advisable that the church, at a certain point, determines that the English language has changed sufficiently to recommend to the churches a new English translation from the original languages. Officebearers ought to make this clear

9 Letis preferred the expression “ecclesiastical text.” His major works include: *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Philadelphia: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Textual Studies, 2000); *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind* (Philadelphia: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 2000); *A New Hearing for the Authorized Version* (Philadelphia: The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1997). Letis’ entire library, including many rare works and many of Letis’ private papers, is still being incorporated into the PRC Seminary library and should be available for research by the end of the year 2012.

10 It may be admitted that some of her members may advocate such a view. I once received a mildly angry letter from a member of a PRC in response to a suggestion I made in writing that a particular verse in the KJV “could be translated more accurately....” Behind that letter was the thinking that the KJV may not be and cannot be corrected or improved.

11 A closely related debate is whether only the *autographa* (the original writings of the prophet or apostle, long lost) are infallible, or whether also the *apographa* (extant copies of the original writings) are infallible. One source to begin study of this is an explanation of the views of John Owen and Francis Turretin at *kjvonlydebate.com*.

to the people of God so that none of them is vulnerable to the radical positions of KJV-Only-ism.

Second, let us be sober in our assessment of the new translations—both of their quality and of the consequences of their errors. If my first caution is to be sober about the KJV's quality, my second call is for sobriety in assessing the new translations.

The newer versions are not all of the same quality, nor do they all partake of the same errors, as will be shown. There is such a variety among them, from very bad to very good, that to categorize them all in one group betrays ignorance if not dishonesty. To criticize "dynamic equivalent" translations, for example, just because they are "dynamic equivalent," without recognizing that there are *degrees* of dynamic equivalency, is wrong. Or to criticize them all as "not following the *textus receptus*," without knowing the issues in the debate of TR, MT, etc., is not honest scholarship.

Second, matters must not be overstated when one draws conclusions about the *consequences* of bad translations, or the *motives* of the translators who made what we judge to be mistakes. All have heard it stated, for example, that adoption of *this* translation will quickly lead a church to deny the deity of Christ; or adoption of *that* one will expose a church to premillennial eschatology; and yet *another* to a subversion of the teaching of sovereign grace.¹²

If the charges are examined, although one must admit that there are weaknesses in various translations, it will be seen that some weaknesses are worse than others. For example, there is a difference between the RSV's translation of Isaiah 7:14 as "young woman" rather than "virgin," and the NKJV's wording of Revelation 19:8, "the righteous acts of the saints," rather than the AV's "the righteousness of the saints." In addition, it should almost go without saying that the doctrines of Scripture are never dependent on one text.

Third, in a caution of a different kind, care must be exercised when

12 A 2003 letter to the *Standard Bearer* said of one translation of Rev. 19:8, "the essential doctrine of the imputed righteousness of Christ is thus written out at a stroke from the modern versions.... The saints are told that they can appear before the all holy God in the rags they earned for themselves on earth" (9/1/03).

*determining who makes the judgment whether or not it is advisable to consider another English Bible translation.*¹³

Who usually makes the judgment regarding intelligibility? Are they all well-educated who make the judgment that the AV is still easily understandable by the people of God? Have they all been suckled by the KJV, so that its language is second nature to them? Are they perhaps all ministers whose life's work has been to study the Bible and whose training has given them years and years in the KJV, so that they are hardly aware that an archaism is an archaism? I must admit that I fit into all of these categories, and therefore may not be the best one to judge how understandable the KJV is.

To be sure, the ability of the people of God to understand the Bible must not be underestimated. High-school educated believers must not be patronized, as the prefaces of some modern translations do. But neither may it be forgotten that Bible readers are not all college-educated and seminary-trained.

Fourth (a caution now in the opposite direction) *if one supposes another translation is necessary or wise, let him consider very carefully his motives and reasons.* Here, even more patience and care must be exercised. It must be asked, If an alternative Bible translation is considered, what is it about the present version that is deficient, and what is it about the new version that is improvement? On what basis is the judgment made? What assumptions are made about a "good" translation?

First, no one must suppose that a good translation will make the Bible easy to read because the Bible, they say, is a simple book.¹⁴

13 Not insignificant is a related caution not to overstate the case by saying that the KJV may be replaced "only when it becomes completely unreadable." Such statements incline hearers to an extreme position that quickly becomes a KJ-Only stance. When does the KJV become "completely unreadable"?

14 In this section I have been greatly influenced by Leland Ryken's many fine works, especially his *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002). Ryken served on the translation committee for the English Standard Version (2003). Reading his works, however, had the practical effect of strengthening my appreciation for the AV. A series of fine speeches in commemoration of the

This is one of the most common, but improper, assumptions of those who are unsatisfied with the KJV. The reasoning is a simple syllogism: a good Bible translation should be easy to understand; the KJV translation is not easy to understand; therefore, a new Bible translation is needed.

The fallacy of the reasoning is the major premise: *A good Bible translation should be easy to understand*. To be sure, calling that premise a fallacy is not the same as criticizing the Reformation principle of Scripture's perspicuity. Reformed tradition has always asserted, over against Roman Catholicism, that the Bible is perspicuous, that is, clear and understandable by the believer. What perspicuity does *not* mean, however, is that the Bible is uniformly easy to understand. But the prefaces of many modern translations have this assumption and hold this fallacy.

In fact, the opposite is true. The Bible is a very difficult book. It is not easily understood, even in a good translation. And no translator must attempt to make it easy, lest he change the Scriptures. Read any of the prophets, in just about *any* translation, to find that the Bible is simply not simple. Then remember what Jesus said in the beginning of His ministry, about why He spoke in parables—precisely so that not all who heard would understand. Seeing, some would not see and, hearing, some would not comprehend (Matt 13:11,13).

The Scriptures require careful pondering and meditation. Even when the reader has the first qualification for understanding—faith—the meaning will not always become clear immediately for him. Leland Ryken asked:

What is the result when translation committees begin with the assumption of a simple Bible that carries its meaning on the surface and is devoid of sophisticated technique? When translators begin with the premise that the Bible is uniformly simple, they use the process of translation to produce the Bible that they envision. They simplify the vocabulary and syntax. They modify or eliminate figurative language. They add explanatory commentary in their translation. They eliminate

AV by Ryken may be heard at <http://www.gracechurchpca.org/kjv@400.htm>.

theological language. Rhetorical patterning often evaporates. The end product is a Bible that deviates significantly from the original.¹⁵

Second, no one must suppose that a good translation ought to make the Bible sound modern. This is another mistaken assumption adopted today. Because the Bible was written in the language of *their* day, so it is said, a modern translation should be in the language of *our* day. This is presumption. The question is not, “How would we say it?” Or, “How would modern Americans put it?” but “How did God put it?” The Bible is not a modern book, but a book about people and life 2000 years ago and more.

Third (and last regarding motives for a new Bible translation), let no one suppose that, because the KJV has language that modern man does not use—jargon that takes time to learn—it is not a good translation; that a good translation will exclude technical lingo and include only words and language that are understandable by American English readers of the twenty-first century.

Also this argument is flawed, but for a different reason. The language of the Bible must be learned, can be learned. It is not to be changed because “no one should be required to learn a new vocabulary for the sake of reading Scripture.” The Bible has its own language and vocabulary.

I am not referring to the archaisms that the KJV has. Archaisms are not to be identified with “the language of the Bible,” although some avid defenders of the AV do so.¹⁶ Archaisms are one of the weaknesses of the AV. If ever I promote a new translation, I would promote elimination of the archaisms.¹⁷

Rather, I am referring to language in Bible versions that belongs to

15 Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 71.

16 See Edward F. Hills’ otherwise superb work, *The KJV Defended* (DeMoines: Christian Research Press, reprint 1993): “more and more we are learning that the language of the NT was biblical rather than contemporary” (p. 213). On the subject of archaisms, see Robert Harbach’s pamphlet, “Bible Archaisms and Modern Versions” (Reformed Witness Committee of the Hope Protestant Reformed Church, 1984).

17 See my conclusions, below.

the Bible as Bible, language that belongs to the church, new language that must be learned by someone who is a Christian.

The response to this criticism (no one should be expected to learn a completely new vocabulary in order to understand the Bible) may not be appreciated, but it is simple: The Bible has its own vocabulary (jargon) just as *any* field of specialty does. And, just as everyone today who specializes in certain fields is *willing* to learn the language of that specialty—and does not complain—so should students of the Bible.

A couple of examples will make this clear. People with hobbies are willing to spend hours and even years learning the specialty language of that hobby. Fans of Rowling’s Harry Potter books are willing, even eager, to learn the vocabulary of wizards, muggles, and ancient myth. Computer-speak is a field by itself. And though texting abbreviations may not be considered specialty language, texting has created something that is as strange as a new language. Our daughter-in-law recently sent us a rare text that ended: “TTYL.” My wife and I had no idea what it meant. But if you will survive in the realm of texting, some new things need to be learned. Perhaps there are other illustrations of the point, but the point is not hard to demonstrate.

Likewise, no one must object when we expect *Bible*-readers to learn a vocabulary that is unique to the things of God Himself. To lose the language of Christianity is to lose Christianity.

* * * * *

With those cautions and qualifications behind, I now offer some analysis and criticism of some other English Bible versions, and begin with some general assertions.¹⁸

First, the new translations are not all equally bad or weak. I categorize them into three groups: Bad, Very Bad, and Not-As-Bad, which three-fold *negative* categorization reveals a bias I have not been trying to hide.

In my “Very Bad” category I include those that claim to be translations but are not. Instead, they are paraphrases, sometimes gender-neutered,

18 For a helpful summary of Modern English Bible Translations, one can do worse than starting with the Wikipedia article entitled “Modern English Bible Translations” at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Modern_English_Bible_translations)

theologically-careless, and intentionally-liberal translations. The student of Scripture ought to have a copy of some of these, for the same reason that a minister keeps works of James Arminius and Rob Bell. In this category are the newer members of the NIV family, the Living Bible (Kenneth Taylor, 1971); the New Living Translation (1996, 2004); The Message (2002); Phillips' The Bible in Modern English; the 1995 Contemporary English Version (by the American Bible Society); and the Good News Bible. "Very Bad" include also those versions that have theological or sectarian agendas, like the RSV (1952); those of the Roman Catholic Church (like the New American Bible of 1970 and a dozen others both before and after 1970); the Jehovah's Witnesses' New World Translation (first published in 1961); the Mormons' Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible; and The Inspired Version of the Bible (1830), etc.

I categorize as merely "Bad" the translations both based on a wrong text and created under a wrong philosophy of translation, as I will explain below. I include in this category the original NIV and others like it.

"Not-As-Bad" (and notice that that's *still a negative* description of versions that may have some very good qualities) are those newer translations that attempt to be like the KJV. They use the right original texts, and they have a translation philosophy that is as literal as is possible. Again, also these vary greatly in quality. Here, I mention the New King James Version (1982); the 21st Century KJV (1994),¹⁹ sometimes called the "New Authorized Version"; the KJVII,²⁰ the Modern King James Version (1999).²¹

Then there are Bibles that fit in none of these categories. Some have the right philosophy of translation but the wrong text. Most notable are the ESV and the NASB, the former very popular at present, the latter severely criticized because of its too-literal-and-therefore-

19 For more on this version, see below, footnote 48.

20 Jay P. Green, Sr., authored many of the translations attempting to model the AV, including perhaps the earliest effort, the Children's King James Version (1960).

21 For the others in the almost incomprehensible tangle of KJV 'copy-cats,' see the list in the Wikipedia article "Modern English Bible Translations." This list includes fifteen "King James" Versions.

wooden translation—bad English style. The Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB)²² is based on modern text criticism²³ and intended to be a moderate position *between* the formal equivalence and dynamic equivalence theories. Perhaps it will be pointed out that another version uses the right text but has the wrong philosophy of translation, though that would be surprising.

There are many issues of secondary significance that could be mentioned as to weaknesses in modern translations. Although secondary in my judgment, they are not insignificant. I point out three.

First, some manifest pride. Listen, in their prefaces, to how they will “correct the many errors of the KJV,” are “vast improvements over the old versions,” and how they leave the impression that if anyone wants to use the old versions he ought to be checked for a fever or checked into an institution. The pride is also expressed when it is said with the dismissive air of some scholars that the KJV translators are not to be criticized, they simply did not have the best texts available to them.

Second, some are deceptive. Though I must not overstate the case, students of Bible translations must educate themselves in reading prefaces, especially to listen for what is not said, for often what is not said is often more significant than what is said. Then, listen for the buzz-words that indicate a certain philosophy of translation that will not be literal, but very loose.

Third, many use colloquial language and are undignified. All by itself, this ought to be a reason to reject some of the newer translations. Style might not seem so important, but it is. The new translations are often the “language of the street,” the newspaper, the grocery store, by design. The old were the dignified style that does justice to the fact that the Bible isn’t a newspaper, but the word of the sovereign God Himself.²⁴

22 Although I had heard of the Bible before, I was not aware that this was a *translation*. Nor was I aware of its popularity—in some lists it’s in the top 10 Bible sellers; for example, number six on 2011 CBA Retailer’s list in both categories—dollar sales and unit sales.)

23 Arthur Farstad, who began the project, intended it to be TR-based.

24 Few have made this point more masterfully than Leland Ryken. See his *The Word of God in English...*, especially pages 270- 271.

Those criticisms and others aside, I focus on two major considerations: the Greek and Hebrew texts used to make the translation²⁵ and the philosophy of translation. As the Trinitarian Bible Society's new booklet says, "...the issues at stake in the proper transmission of the divine record: which texts, translated under which principles..."²⁶

The text

The issue here regards which old manuscripts (copies of the Hebrew and Greek originals) are used to make the English translation. There are differences in the old copies of the Hebrew and Greek texts and it must be determined which is the proper manuscript to use. About 120 years ago, to oversimplify this, two very old Greek manuscripts were found—one in Egypt and one in the Vatican—that differed fairly significantly from the copies that were used to translate the Bible both for centuries before and centuries after the Reformation; differed from the manuscripts used to translate the KJV. These old manuscripts are centuries older than the others that had been known since the early church era. To oversimplify the debate, the modern assumption is that "if it is older it must be better." In the prefaces of the new translations may be heard the claim that the KJV translators did not have the advantage of modern research—that is, the advantage of textual criticism based on these older manuscripts.

There are many good books written on the subject of the original manuscripts of the Bible. My recommendation would be to start with reading Wilbur Pickering,²⁷ Jakob VanBruggen,²⁸ or Edward F. Hills.²⁹

25 No English translation should use anything other than the original languages. But a caution is issued here, too, and a reminder that some of the Reformation translations of the Bible into English fall into this category.

26 *The Authorized Version: A Wonderful and Unfinished History* (C.P. Hallihan, London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2010, p.9. Trinitarian Bible Society's works are available in pdf format on the Internet, this one at <http://www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/site/articles/A124.pdf>).

27 *The Identity of the New Testament Text*, 2d ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1980).

28 *The Future of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1978).

29 *The King James Version Defended* (Des Moines: The Christian Research Press, 1984.) See especially chapter 4, "A Christian View of the

Suffice it to say that “older is better” is a fallacy, answered well in the scholarly books written about these manuscripts. To go further than the works of the three authors listed above, one may consult the library of Theodore Letis, and the works of Letis himself, who specialized on this question of manuscripts.³⁰

Second, there is good reason to believe the argument of the providential preservation of God’s Word, that is, that God preserved His Word in its original integrity, and would not have allowed it to be lost for almost 2000 years. The argument includes a point that rings true to this writer: God would not allow His church to hold the Scriptures without the church having any confidence that what she holds is indeed the Word of God; or, worse, that the only way to be confident that it is the Word of God is to hear experts, textual critics, say so.

The philosophy of translation

Second, most of the newer translations have adopted the translation philosophy called Dynamic Equivalence.

Dynamic Equivalence is best understood when contrasted to the theory used to translate the King James Version. The KJV translators were guided by what is called a “formal equivalence” or “literal equivalence” theory, in which as much as possible every word in the original receives an English equivalent; and as much as possible even the grammar, word order, and style must be preserved. Determinative is “word-for-word,” but also “as much as possible.” So much was this a concern for the KJV translators that any word not in the original Hebrew or Greek that was added to the English in order to make it read smoothly was put in italics.

“Dynamic equivalence,” in contrast, emphasizes not so much the words themselves, but the *ideas*; and it concerns itself not so much with how it was said in the original but *how we would say it today*.

Leland Ryken explains dynamic equivalence in his *The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation*.

Biblical Text.” First published in 1956. The 1984 edition has a preface by Theodore Letis.

30 See footnote 9.

...a seismic shift in translation theory and practice occurred in the middle of the twentieth century. Up to that point, most English Bible translations had operated on the premise that the task of English Bible translation was to reproduce the words of the original in the words of the receptor language. Accuracy of translation took precedence over literary style.... (T)he theory of dynamic equivalence in Bible translation emphasizes *the reaction of the reader* to the translated text, rather than *the translation of the words and phrases* themselves. In simplest terms, dynamic equivalence is often referred to as “thought for thought” translation as compared to “essentially literal” translation.³¹

The origin of this translation methodology is usually traced to Eugene Nida, “who almost single-handedly changed the course of English Bible translation.”³² A mid-twentieth century missionary specializing in Bible translations, Nida proposed in a more formal way the theory that put focus first of all on the people who would be hearing or reading the Bible. Nida began with the modern hearer of the Word rather than the author of the Word, with the non-Christians who must hear the gospel rather than God who wrote the gospel.

Then, likely without conscious justification, this philosophy used by missionaries to translate the Bible into newly discovered *foreign* languages was used to translate the Bible into the long-established *English* language.

The fallacy of the dynamic equivalent translation philosophy is Nida’s major thesis: “We must translate not according to how God did say it, but according to how we would say it.” The Word of God is the Word of God, written and spoken in the way God willed that it be spoken. Respect for God’s Word requires that it be translated literally as much as possible.

The consequences of dynamic equivalence as a translation theory for the Bible include:³³

1) Interpretations of the original rather than translations of the original are given. When other interpretations are possible, one inter-

31 Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 13. Emphasis in the original.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid. 209ff.

pretation is given, with the impression left that it is the *only* interpretation. Where ambiguity ought to be left to the reader to sort out, the translators give their interpretation. An example is the interpreting of the genitives rather than retaining the more uncertain “of the....”³⁴

2) Long sentences are broken up to make them easier to read, or groups of participles are divided into separate sentences, making an admittedly difficult grouping *now impossible* to ponder (e.g. Eph. 9:19-21).

3) Lost are the dignity, majesty, grandeur of the Bible *as the Word of God*. Many dynamic equivalent translations want to read like the newspaper, sound like the people on the street or the shopper in the grocery store. The old maintained a dignified style that did justice to the fact that the Bible is not a newspaper.³⁵

4) Because of the above, the new translations are very soon dated, so soon in fact that new editions of these translations are often offered annually. Christopher Hitchens’ mockery of the Good News Bible translation of I Corinthians 13 applies to many dynamic equivalent translations. The Good News Bible translates the familiar passage: “Love never gives up; and its faith, hope, and patience never fail.” Hitchens, a professing atheist, says, “This doesn’t read at all like the outcome of a struggle to discern the essential meaning of what is perhaps our most numinous word. It more resembles a smiley-face Dale Carnegie reassurance. And,

34 Even beginning students of Greek understand that one of the most important elements of Greek grammar is the careful examination of the genitive. An example of this (noted in the recent ordination sermon of one of our graduates) is I Timothy 4:12, where in the KJV the apostle instructs Timothy, “be thou an example *of the believers*....” Other translations have, “set an example *for the believers*” (NIV); “be an example *to the believers*” (NKJ); “set the believers an example” (ESV 2007). The Greek is “τύπος γίου τῶν πιστῶν.” More important would be a genitive like “the love of Christ,” in I Corinthians 5:14, which in the Greek is ἀγάπη τοῦ Χριστοῦ. Is the genitive objective or subjective, or are both in view? The modern translations often *interpret* rather than translate the genitive. In this case, the NIV makes it the simple *possessive*: “Christ’s love.”

35 For examples of this, see Ryken, *The Word of God in English*, 270, 271.

as with everything else that's designed to be instant, modern, and 'accessible,' it goes out of date (and out of time) faster than Wisconsin cheddar."³⁶

The church needs a translation that, *as much as possible*, follows word-for-word the Word of God as it was given to us in the Hebrew and Greek original. Indeed, careful study will reveal that the AV did not hold absolutely to a requirement to translate everything word-for-word.³⁷ Besides, judgments will vary in respect to "as much as possible." But "literally *as much as possible*" is significantly different than, "How would modern man say this today?"

A brief mention of a few modern translations

The material available to study particular translations is unending. One may begin by a quick search the Internet.³⁸ But a student

36 *Vanity Fair*, May, 2011, quotation from *AlbertMohler.com*, April 7, 2011.

37 A careful search of the KJV will yield numerous examples of what some might call "dynamic equivalent" translations in the King James Version. The AV's translation of the Greek pascha as "Easter" rather than Passover in Acts 12:4 would be an example. Another would be the translation of Amos 4:4 as "years" even though the Hebrew is "days." Why? Because the translators judged that this was *intended*, because this is what the law in Deuteronomy required. But the Hebrew says "days." Here, the translators would say, "Literal, as much as possible." "God forbid" is probably the best example of dynamic equivalent translation where a literal translation is, "may it never be." Other examples may be found in the works of King-James-Only opponents. See James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy: Can You Trust the Modern Translations?*, particularly his chapter 9, "Problems in the KJV." The value of White's work is that, while I do not agree with his final conclusions, he is not an opponent of the King James, but of King-James-Onlyism. It must be admitted, however, that finding some examples of "non-literal translation" is a world apart from having dynamic equivalence as a translation *philosophy*.

38 One of the easiest places to start, surprisingly, is Wikipedia's articles: "Modern English Bible Translations" and "List of English Bible Translations," each of which links you to other, more extensive articles on each of the versions.

of Scripture will educate himself by reading both the defenders of the new translations³⁹ and those who are opposed to them.⁴⁰

Length limitations do not permit this article to examine a list of specific translations, but I mention a few.

The New International Version (NIV) is the best-selling English translation. The NIV is a Dynamic Equivalent translation and is based on the “critical text.” Because each new edition comes with many changes, the reader must know which edition he is using. Some of the NIV editions are gender-neutral.⁴¹ Many evangelicals are moving away from the NIV because of the perceived weaknesses I have mentioned. The new choice of many is the English Standard Version (ESV).

The ESV is popular. Westminster Books on-line store claimed in 2011 that it was the fastest-selling new product in the history of their store. First published by Crossway in 2003, it was revised in 2007, with another revision in 2011.

Personally, I had hopes for the ESV because its editors and translators were determined not to use the dynamic equivalent philosophy of translation.⁴² Because it is committed to “literal equivalence,” many evangelicals praise it, and Reformed scholars recommend it. But its adoption of the critical text, in my estimation, disqualifies it as a Bible of the church.⁴³

If I were ever required to recommend an existing translation as an

39 Beware, many are market-driven and commercial enterprises.

40 Here, beware that many, if not most, written critiques of the new translations are from KJV-Only advocates.

41 Some of the editions are: NIV (New International Reader’s Version, 1996); NIVI (New International Version Inclusive Language Edition, 1996); TNIV (Today’s New International Version, 2005); and the NIV 2011.

42 Crossway’s on-line advertising says about the version: “The goal and vision of the ESV Study Bible is, first and foremost, to honor the Lord—in terms of the excellence, beauty, and accuracy” (see <http://www.esvstudybible.org/#home> accessed October 1, 2011).

43 I have a copy of the large, personal study edition of the ESV, and refer to it frequently in our family worship when we have questions about the text we are reading. I have found its translation accurate and dignified, and its study notes, charts, and graphs, helpful.

alternative to the King James Version—to be adopted by a denomination for use in the churches and recommended to the members—and recommend one realizing that even it had flaws, as of today I would likely vote for the New King James Version (NKJV). I do not recommend the NKJV. I understand its weaknesses. I have studied the issues. But if I were required to recommend one of the existing translations, this would be the translation. The reader should not overlook the hypothetical nature of this “recommendation.”

Although I see the NKJV as less weak than the other *textus receptus*-based translations, and strongly inclined to a “literal equivalence” translation philosophy, there are a few things one should know about the NKJV. First, it is not fully based on the *textus receptus*, but on an eclectic text. Footnotes indicate readings from the critical text. Sometimes an alternate reading based on the critical text is in the footnote itself. A reading of its preface will make this clear. Although it is closer to the proper text than the NIV or the ESV, it is not the “received text” as most are inclined to think.⁴⁴ Second, it is not a simple updating of the archaic language of the KJV, but a relatively extensive modernizing, in my judgment often unnecessary. Third, more serious in this writer’s estimation, and greatly disappointing, the NKJV also has more than one edition, with differences in each edition.⁴⁵ As I will argue, below, the church ought to have a translation that will be fixed for generations.

There have been other attempts at modifying and improving the KJV, while maintaining the proper text and the philosophy of translation. I mention a few.⁴⁶

44 For an explanation of the text behind the NKJV, helpful is the “Preface” of the New Geneva Study Bible, Thomas Nelson, 1995, x-xiii.

45 For example, in Genesis 37:5, “dreamed a dream” in 1983; “had a dream” in 1991. In I Pet. 3:20, “the longsuffering of God” in 1983, and “divine suffering” in 1991. Will the next edition have more changes? Will the reader be informed of all the changes in some way?

46 A rather complete list: CKJV (Children’s KJV, Jay P. Green, 1960); KJII (King James II Version of the Bible, Jay P. Green, 1971); KJV20 (King James Version—Twentieth Century Edition, Jay P. Green); NKJV (New King James Version, 1982); MKJV (Modern King James Version, 1999);

The KJVII and the Modern KJV,⁴⁷ by Jay P. Green, Sr., are the fruit of one man's work. Although a few of the Reformation's translations were made by one man, by this time in the history of the church a translation adopted by the church ought to be the fruit of a "multitude of counselors."⁴⁸

The 21st Century KJV,⁴⁹ probably the least changed of the KJV family of translations, has the most objectionable features. First, the original languages were not utilized by the translators (thus, they cannot even be called "translators"). The tools used were a dictionary, a thesaurus, and other Bible versions. Second, it was made by a committee of three with no ecclesiastical support. Third, it capitalizes pronouns the translators *thought* referred to God. Fourth, it uses different type-styles to indicate passages of varying value to the reader. Fifth, in later editions it manifests an ecumenical agenda, appealing to Roman Catholics.⁵⁰

AKJV (American King James Version, 1999); KJV2000; UKJV (Updated KJV, 2000); KJVER (King James Version Easy Reading, 2001); HSE (Holy Scriptures in English, 2001); CKJV (Comfortable King James Version, 2003); NCPB (New Cambridge Paragraph Bible, 2005); AV7 (New Authorized Version, 2006); AVU (Authorized Version Update, 2006). Many of these versions are difficult to find, but are listed in the *Wikipedia* article, "Modern English Bible translations."

47 Published by Sovereign Grace Trust Fund, Lafayette, Indiana, copyright 1962, 1990.

48 Although many Bible students profited greatly from some of Green's works, especially his *The Interlinear Hebrew Greek English Bible* that appeared before the days of useful computerized helps, many of Green's publications appeared hastily produced and poorly edited.

49 Published by 21st Century King James Bible Publishers, A division of Deuel Enterprises, Inc., Gary, South Dakota. The dust jacket advertises, "The KJ21 is *not* a new translation or a revision, but an *updating* of the original King James Version.... This *updated* 21st Century KJV retains the unparalleled power, beauty, and dignity of the King James Version while using modern punctuation, paragraphing and wording to make the KJ21 easier to read and understand."

50 Theodore Letis spoke positively of the KJ21 when it first appeared: "This ever so conservative update of the 1611 may be just the answer for the present hunger for traditional substance over contemporary glitz.... Fur-

A new translation?

Should a conservative Reformed church that uses the KJV in the early twenty-first century seek an alternative to the KJV? Two notes by way of introduction to the subject.

First, it is questionable whether a small group—denomination or group of individuals—has the resources of manpower, finance, and scholarship to produce a translation that meets the standards that ought to be retained for the Word of God.

Second, the faint desire I have for another translation (as I explain further, below) does not compel me to propose consideration either of an entirely new effort or the adoption of an existing translation. However, churches that maintain the King James Version ought to caution themselves not to expose their membership to the dangerous mentality of the King-James-Only advocates. This danger is no chimera.

Third, my faint desire remains because, even if it is possible for an individual or a family to understand the KJV Bible with *helps*—dictionaries and notes and parallel Bibles—the precious time for family worship is far better used for explanation, application, and meditation. Then, I want to urge my children and grandchildren to read the Scriptures in personal and private worship, with the confidence that they will not be hindered by the difficulty of both the archaic language and the archaic grammar and style of the church's Bible version. This, I explain further below.

thermore, this KJ21 is the only attempted update that I have observed which *does not* alter the text of the old KJV in order to bring it up to date to some supposed superior modern Greek or Hebrew recension.” Letis concluded: “Overall this is a most worthy endeavor bound to appeal both to those who never lost their devotion to this classic, as well as to those who stayed away because of its intrinsic difficulties. This edition will assure that the Bible produced via the genius of that Anglican *via media* will retain its place within religious usage well into the next millennium” (from a review, published at <http://www.kj21.com/letis.htm>). On the publisher's main web-page, Letis is quoted as saying, “*The 21st Century King James Bible (KJ21)* is completely trustworthy and should be encouraged for use by children, by adults, for devotional use and for serious biblical exposition. I can say this about no other contemporary edition. It receives my full endorsement.” This statement is linked to Letis' review, and thus appears to be part of it, but is not.

Translation requirements

FIRST: the principles for creation or adoption of a new translation would begin with the *proper text* and the proper *philosophy of translation*, as explained earlier in this paper. These two stand above everything else.⁵¹

SECOND: a new translation should be undertaken only by the church and churches. There is something so important about Bible version that relates to unity in a denomination that there ought not be one version in this congregation and another in that; one version used by this preacher for his catechism students and another by that one. The result is confusion, to say nothing of criticism and comparison (“Our church uses the KJV. You use which one?!”)

51 The guidelines used for the New King James translation show careful thought and are worthy of consideration: “1. Retain all doctrinal and theological words unless the Greek or Hebrew clearly indicates otherwise. 2. Retain words for items no longer in current use (e.g., *chariot* or *phylacteries*). 3. Replace words that have changed meaning since 1611 with their modern equivalents. 4. Replace archaic idioms with their modern equivalents. 5. Replace words and expressions that have become vulgar or indelicate in current English usage with their proper equivalents. 6. Alter punctuation to conform with that currently used. 7. Change all Elizabethan pronouns, verb forms, and words having archaic endings to their current equivalents. 8. Attempt to keep King James word order. However, when comprehension or readability is affected, transpose or revise sentence structure. 9. Eliminate the inordinate usage of the auxiliary verb “shall.” Follow current grammatical style for these changes. 10. Attempt to keep sentences reasonably short without affecting text or meaning. 11. Attempt to use words that avoid misunderstanding. 12. When making corrections, use other words already represented by the same Greek or Hebrew word in the King James if possible. 13. Capitalize all personal pronouns referring to deity. 14. Make New Testament proper names agree with Old Testament spellings (e.g., *Isaiah*, not *Esaias*; *Elijah*, not *Elias*). 15. Replace all obsolete and archaic words as defined by one or more recognized dictionaries with their current equivalents. This applies to phrases and idioms as well.” (These guidelines are taken from *KJV:NKJV Parallel Reference Bible*, Thomas Nelson, 1991, xxi-xxiv.) Compare these with the 15 guidelines from King James (cf. R. Cammenga’s article in this issue on the history of the KJV).

THIRD: the translators must be fully qualified, both intellectually and spiritually. They must be orthodox, believing men, who are also fully knowledgeable of the original languages.

FOURTH: no one should argue to retain archaisms.

An exception is the important distinction between the second person singular and the second person plural, which should be retained, even when modern English has no easy way to express this.⁵²

But other archaisms are unnecessary hindrances, to one degree or another, to proper understanding of the Word of God. Because those of us who love the King James are not easily convinced of this, I offer a somewhat random list of archaic words:

chambering (Rom. 13:13), champaign (Deut. 11:30), charger (Matt. 14:8—it is not a horse), churl (Is. 32:7), ceiled (Hag. 1:4), circumspect (Ex. 23:13), clouted upon their feet (Josh. 9:5), cocatrice (Is. 11:8), collops (Job 15:27), confection (Ex. 30:35—it has nothing to do with sugar), cotes (II Chron. 32:28), covert (II Kings 16:18), hoised (Acts 27:40), wimples (Is. 3:22), stomacher (Is. 3:24), wot (Rom. 11:2), wist (Acts 12:9), withs (Judg. 16:7), wont (Dan. 3:19), suretiship (Prov. 11:15), sackbut (Dan. 3:5), the scall (Lev. 13:30), scrabbled (I Sam. 21:13), roller (Ezek. 30:21—i.e., a splint), muffler (Is. 3:19—not from Midas), forward (I Pet. 2:18), brigadine (Jer. 46:4), amerce (Deut. 22:19), blains (Ex. 9:9), crockbackt (Lev. 21:20), descry (Judg. 1:23), fanners (Jer. 51:2), felloes (I Kings 7:33), glede (Deut. 14:13), glistening (Luke 9:29), habergeon (Job 41:26), implead (Acts 19:38), neeing (Job 41:18), nitre (Prov. 25:20), tabret (Gen. 31:27), wen (Lev. 22:22).⁵³

No defender of the KJV should dismissively refer to the archaisms as easy to figure out or learn, unimportant, and very few. Words

52 Retaining this important grammatical distinction between plural (“you”) and singular (“thou”) is not sufficient reason to retain all the archaic pronouns and verb endings. Wm. Hendriksen’s *New Testament Commentary* has a unique method that could be considered: plural is expressed by “y o u” (spaces between the letters); singular by “you” (no spaces).

53 Dr. Edwin Palmer, quoted in James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy*, 236, 237.

like those above that have fallen out of usage, and are not uniquely biblical words, ought to be changed; and expressions that belong to seventeenth century grammar and style should be put in proper (majestic, reverent, dignified) English of today.⁵⁴

Although some of the examples above may be obscure and relatively unimportant words (wimple, fanner, glistening), II Corinthians 8:1 does not fall into that category. When the church's children read in the King James, "We do you to wit of the grace of God..." they must not stumble over the unnecessary archaic presentation of that beautiful and vital expression.⁵⁵

To ask for modernizing of the AV's archaisms is not disrespectfully to criticize the venerable King James Version, but to make clear the real benefit of a translation in which the unnecessary archaisms are not hindrances. And it is not out of order to remind ourselves that this is precisely what the original translators of the AV intended: to make the Word of God understandable by the "boy behind the plow."

FIFTH: translators should be guided by what Leland Ryken called a "concordance of the original." That is, one should translate the same Hebrew (or Greek) word with the same English word, throughout, as much as possible. Interestingly, the King James translators deliberately avoided this, as they express in their "Translators to the Readers." They were proud of the thesaurus of English words available to them and wanted to use as many as possible for style, beauty, and variety. In addition, because the King James Version was made by various committees, and because without computers it was not possible to compare such things, some words they may have *intended* to translate similarly were not. Thus, for example, the important Hebrew word

54 Another important exception to this would be *retaining* archaic expressions that have become so much a part of current English usage as to be familiar. This retention of archaic expressions is sometimes called by translators "the Lord's Prayer principle," because even though the Lord's Prayer has some archaisms, its general familiarity would allow and even advise its preservation in King James English.

55 The New King James is a good translation: "Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia."

חָשַׁב (chasab), used twice in Genesis 50:20, is translated in the AV, in the same verse, first as “thought” and then as “meant.” Readers of the KJV have no knowledge that the same important word is used both regarding Joseph’s brothers and regarding God.

In the same category, although slightly different, there ought to be a standardization of spelling of names in the whole Bible, from the Old Testament to the New Testament—Hosea instead of Osee in the New Testament; Joshua and not Hoshea.⁵⁶

Conclusions

But my desires for such a version have diminished. First, as I mentioned earlier, over the course of a summer’s study, my esteem of the KJV has risen. Second, there have been so many translations that have been produced in recent decades, and confusion has come from the proliferation of them. Rather than aiding the people of God in their study of the Scriptures, the multiplicity of translations, and translations with multiple revisions, have done damage. The climate created by the proliferation of new translations is not for the church’s welfare. It is not unlike the climate of cell-phone technology, where an effective advertisement can play on the fears of people that today they buy the newest technology, but tomorrow someone else will have a device with more features than theirs. Applied to the Bible, it’s a culture of change that undermines the people’s confidence in the Bible itself.⁵⁷ If the church is to adopt another translation, it ought to do so with the confidence that it should last for generations.

An illustration should make plain the confidence I believe the church ought to have in the translation they adopt, a confidence that the church’s children ought to have. About fifteen years ago when visiting my hometown of Redlands, California, to speak for a young people’s convention, I found a little book bindery and spent \$100 on

⁵⁶ With reason, some would argue that poetic forms in the prophets, e.g., *Palestina*, should be retained.

⁵⁷ The instability of modern versions ought to be disturbing. Aside from the differences between the NIV and its successors with different names, how many changes have been made in the NIV from 1973 to 2011? This is a poor testimony to the church’s children regarding the reliability of God’s word.

the best leather binding I could get for my already-old King James Version—a 4th edition Thompson Chain Reference. The book-binder said that even with daily use, the binding would last 100 years. I believe him, because though I use the Bible every Sunday on the pulpit and every day in the seminary classroom, the binding looks today as it did fifteen years ago. *That* is the mentality I pray will be promoted with a Bible version—it will be around for another 100 years! Your children and grandchildren can trust that the Word they hold is the unchanging Word of God.

Then, if another version is not adopted in their lifetime, those who use the King James Version may be reminded of its blessings. Generally, it is clear. No one questions its qualities as dignified, majestic, and beautiful. The people of God still use it today with great profit. And if my principles did not keep me from making wagers, I would be willing to bet that the young people in the PRC who use the King James Version are more fluent in Bible knowledge than the great majority of Christians in the world today. This is not a boast, but a humble recognition that, in spite of what could be improved in the King James, it is a good translation that God has marvelously blessed.

But let us not spend so much time debating the need of a new translation, and fail to use what we have. Let us use the Word of God.

If I may be personal, in my family, by the grace of God, we carry on the tradition passed to us by our parents and we pray is practiced by our married children—daily, family worship around the Word of God. To keep us all alert (though our numbers have gone from eight to two or three, now) each has a Bible, a KJV. Presently, one is a Cambridge Bible with no notes. Another is a Matthew Henry Study Bible; the notes attached, although not technical, are orthodox commentary, often helpful. Another is a study Bible with notes that often are helpful, even though often not doctrinally sound. But our grounding in the Reformed faith will help us spit out the chaff in these notes. Sometimes we have employed a good parallel Bible (either NKJ or NIV). One year we looked more often at the New Geneva Study Bible. Presently we take note of the ESV translation and notes.

Although I judge these other translations as lacking, we use them as commentary. Very often they are helpful with difficult passages. But frequently, in the very difficult ones, they reveal that the difficulty is not cleared up by a different translation.

But let us use the Bible, in public and private, with the conviction that the Word of God is food for our soul, unbreakable, profitable in all things, so that we live with the confession, “Oh, how love I thy law; it is my meditation day and night.” ●

Book Reviews

The Legacy of the King James Bible: Celebrating 400 Years of the Most Influential English Translation, Leland Ryken. Wheaton: Crossway, 2011. Pp. 265. \$15.00 (paper). [Reviewed by Charles Terpstra.]

“Of making many books” on the King James Version of the Bible during this year of commemorating her 400th anniversary there seems to be “no end” (Eccl.12:12). And truth be told, the study of some of these books is indeed “a weariness of the flesh.” But not so is it with this wonderfully informative and engaging book written by Leland Ryken, professor of English at Wheaton College, master of the English language and its history, and expert witness to the power and influence of the KJV! Not only has Ryken written a number of books dealing with the history and principles of Bible translation (*The Word of God in English: Criteria for Excellence in Bible Translation; Understanding English Bible Translation: The Case for an Essentially Literal Approach*), but he has also lectured specifically on the literary quality of the KJV in his course on sixteenth-century English. He is

well-qualified to give us a unique perspective on the marvelous qualities of the KJV.

Ryken does not, however, unnecessarily praise the KJV, offering us another “hagiographic” book. He presents constructive criticism of it as he covers his material, while also answering the modern critics of the KJV with a positive defense. And he states “up front” in his “Preface” that he does not believe the KJV is the best translation to use today, on several grounds (pp.13-14). In fact, he currently favors and uses the English Standard Version (ESV), having served as a literary stylist for the translation committee that produced this modern version. Yet Ryken is also unswerving in his criticism of the modern versions that are based on the translation philosophy known as “dynamic equivalence,” most notably the NIV (New International Version). In several places in the book he criticizes such

translations/paraphrases, not only for their poor literary quality in comparison with the KJV but also for the principle(s) behind them. Ryken has consistently stood for the principle of an “essentially literal” translation of the Bible, based on the verbal inspiration of God’s Word, a principle he acknowledges the translators of the KJV were committed to as well, which is why he praises the KJV for its accuracy. As a solid evangelical, Ryken writes with high regard for the Scriptures and with great appreciation for carefulness in translating, another thing I appreciated about this book.

So why another book on the KJV? Ryken answers that well in his “Preface”:

The reasons are multiple. One is corrective in nature. In a day when debunking the Bible is common in academic circles, a lot of what is disseminated is simply incorrect. Additionally, as I implied above, the ‘sneer factor’ is very strong in some circles. Some people imply by name-calling that the KJV is ridiculous, but the case for its inferiority is never laid out. I hope that in making the case for the King James Bible I will

prompt people to see that the allegations against the KJV are rarely supported by honest argument.

Something parallel can happen among enthusiasts for the King James Bible. They, too, are capable of asserting their attitude toward the KJV without providing arguments and proofs for what makes the King James Bible excellent. I believe that readers of my book will see reasons for the claims that are made in favor of the King James Bible. A lot of the adulation surrounding the KJV on its four hundredth anniversary can be labeled propagandistic. My book will put the claims on a sound footing (pp. 14-15).

As for the layout of the book, Ryken divides his material into two main halves. “The first half deals with the King James Bible in its original context and as an influence on Bible translation and culture since then. The second half of the book is literary in emphasis. This includes the King James Bible *as* literature—an analysis of its literary qualities—and the influence of the KJV on English and American literature” (p. 15). Accordingly, the four main parts to the book are as follows:

- “Part One: The King James Bible in Its Own Day”
- “Part Two: The King James Bible in History”
- “Part Three: The King James Bible as a Literary Masterpiece”
- “Part Four: The Literary Influence of the King James Bible”

Ryken’s book is further enhanced by various “user-friendly” features. For one thing, helpful historical lists, supporting quotes from leading authorities, and other useful information (e.g., Bible version comparison charts) are set off throughout the book by boxes. These serve to highlight important information about the history, characteristics, and influence of the KJV. Additionally, each chapter concludes with a brief “summary” section and suggestions for “further reading.” And, of course, at the back of the book is a detailed “notes” section for each chapter, a general index of people, places, and subjects covered, and a Scripture index. Crossway and Ryken are to be commended for producing such a fine title that also serves as a great reference work on the KJV.

It is not my purpose in this brief review to summarize all of the material Ryken treats in *The Legacy of the King James Bible*.

Rather I wish to focus on some of the things he has to say about the outstanding qualities of the KJV as a translation and about its influence on the English-speaking world (Parts Two and Three—see above). This, after all, is the heart of this book, in my estimation. Suffice it to say that in his opening chapters (“Part One”—see above) Ryken traces well the historical lineage of the KJV and the history of the making of the KJV itself. And his last section, in which he treats in detail the literary influence of the KJV (“Part Four”—see above), certainly makes for fascinating reading (I was taken aback, to say the least, by the influence the KJV has had on writers in every age since it became the dominant English version—both religious and secular!). These are all chapters worth reading and digesting.

But my interests—and Ryken’s forte—lie in pointing out the remarkable translation traits of the KJV and why these have contributed to its abiding influence both in the church and in the world at large. In chapter four, “The King James Bible of 1611,” Ryken enumerates various qualities that made and still make the KJV such an excellent version

of God's Word. For one thing, he mentions the KJV translators' use of the previous English versions. They "made no attempt to conceal their indebtedness to the past tradition," he states (p. 57). And after quoting from the "Preface" to the KJV in which the translators stated this, Ryken writes these important words:

We should not overlook the significance of that statement. First of all, there is an exemplary humility in the translators' attitude. Second, there is an impulse to give credit where credit is due, even though the King James translators obviously disagreed with their predecessors in many details. Third, ...there is an important principle of Bible translation at stake here, namely, continuity with the mainstream of English Bible translation versus the quest for originality and novelty (a deliberate attempt not to be like previous English translations). It is a fact that producers of modern dynamic equivalent translations often make disparaging comments about the King James Bible. One might wish for more of the graciousness of the King James translators, as well as

their awareness that the grand tradition of English Bible translation is worthy to be perpetuated in many details (p. 57).

Another significant quality Ryken points out about the KJV is that it was a translation well-suited for public use: "Another differentiating trait of the King James Bible is that it is pre-eminently a translation for public use." It "shows its versatility by being ideally suited for oral use in public settings" (p. 60). And after demonstrating that this has been so both in the setting of the public worship of the church as well as in the setting of public discourse, Ryken asks why this is the case and answers thus: "First, it is an oral Bible, meaning that its rhythm flows smoothly off the tongue and into the ear of the listener. The second is a quality of the KJV that regularly gets registered by such words as *dignity* and *eloquence*" (p. 61).

Still another KJV trait worthy of mention according to Ryken is that it is an essentially literal translation:

We get to the heart of the 1611 King James Bible when we consider how the transla-

tors lined up on the question of literal versus free translation. Of course the translators had no clue as to what would happen three and a half centuries after them with the advent of dynamic equivalent translation. It is all the more significant, therefore, that when left to their own designs the translators evolved the principle of verbal equivalence—the practice of making sure that every word in the original biblical text would be represented by an equivalent English word or phrase (p. 61).

This too confirms the high view of Scripture that the KJV translators had. They knew that God had communicated His inspired and infallible Word in the original languages, and they sought to preserve the accuracy and truthfulness of that Word by being faithful to the original words of God in their English translation.

This naturally brings up the question of whether or not the KJV was and still is an accurate translation. Ryken deals with this carefully, and affirms that the version produced in 1611 was indeed then, and remains to this day, an accurate translation. In connection with this question he treats

the “problems” of the archaic language of the KJV and the so-called inferior text on which it is based. Ryken is very fair in his assessment of the KJV on these matters. While he recognizes the archaisms, he concludes this way:

I find myself looking far and wide to find examples in the King James Bible of words whose meanings have changed so drastically that the translation can be called inaccurate. Perhaps the number of these passages is statistically insignificant. But for readers unfamiliar with the King James Bible, the mere presence of archaic language and construction is usually interpreted as evidence that the King James Bible is inaccurate. This is a false impression (p. 63).

And with regard to the NT manuscript issue, Ryken has this to say:

We need to tread cautiously here: to say that the King James New Testament is based on manuscripts that are today considered less than the best can superficially sound more sinister than in fact it is. If

the Received Text is considered by most (not all) modern scholars as second-best, that does not mean that it is bad. The Greek text from which modern translators work is itself constantly being revised, so that a translation fifty years old might also be said to be based on less-than-the-best manuscripts. Additionally, the actual differences between the Received Text and modern conflated texts (“the Majority Text”) are minor, and modern editions of the King James Bible indicate textual variants in scholarly footnotes, so no one is in danger of being misled by a modern edition of the KJV (p. 64).

To demonstrate further the accuracy of the KJV, Ryken provides several concrete examples. His first one draws a comparison between the KJV rendering of James 1:18b and several dynamic equivalent translations on the same passage:

- ‘...that we should be a kind of first fruits of his creatures’ (KJV).
- ‘He wanted us to be his own special people’ (CEV).
- ‘And we, out of all creation, became his choice possession’ (NLT).

- ‘...so that we should have first place among all his creatures’ (GNB) [p. 64].

To which he adds:

Which of these is the most accurate? Surprise of surprises—the KJV is the most accurate because the translators gave us the equivalent English word with *firstfruits*. The original text says nothing about “special people,” “choice possession,” or “first place.” It compares God’s people to one of the Old Testament Mosaic produce offerings (“firstfruits”).

Modern colloquializing translators lament that Bible translations run the risk of being further and further removed from the everyday language of people. This of course needs to be taken seriously. But an even worse problem is possible: many modern translations have moved further and further from the biblical text.

Whether or not the King James is an accurate version depends partly on how we define accuracy. If we believe that the standard of accuracy is a translation’s giving us the words of the original text in equivalent English words,

then the KJV shows its superior accuracy over dynamic equivalent translations on virtually every page of the Bible (and probably multiple times on every page) [pp. 64-66].

In the final part of this review I wish to cover some of what Ryken writes concerning the KJV as a “literary masterpiece” (“Part Three”—see above). Also in this section Ryken grounds his thoughts in the fact that the KJV is a translation faithful to the form of the original languages in which the Bible was given to us. His chief argument is that the KJV is an excellent literary version because it follows the great literary style of the original languages.

We can say summarily that the ultimate touchstone by which we can recognize literature is that it deviates positively from everyday discourse. Everyday expository discourse seeks to be transparent: it does not call attention to itself but exists to move a reader or listener as directly as possible to a body of information. By contrast, literature consistently draws attention to itself. With literature we are continuously aware that the author is doing things with

language and discourse that we do not do in ordinary discourse. Advocates of modern colloquial Bible translations want the Bible to sound like the newspaper and conversation at the bus stop. Literature always has properties that remove it from those types of discourse.

With that as the starting point, it is readily apparent when an English Bible translation rises to the status of being literary. It is literary when it preserves the literary qualities of the Bible in its original Hebrew and Greek form. This starts with the literary genres of the Bible, most obviously with the poetry but extending to other genres as well. Second, a literary Bible retains the vividness and experiential quality of the Bible. And it culminates in the style with which the original is embodied in the English language....

The King James Bible is the gold standard for a literary Bible, as posterity has correctly asserted (pp. 121-122).

And Ryken says this “literary superiority” of the KJV was recognized from the beginning, even though the high praise for its outstanding literary qualities

would not come for another one hundred years:

It is unlikely that the King James Bible would have supplanted the Geneva Bible as quickly as it did if it did not have qualities that won the hearts of the faithful. Excellence of form always increases the impact of an utterance, and it stands to reason that the literary quality of the KJV was recognized even if that subject was not on people's radar screens until a century later (p. 122).

In his next two chapters in this section Ryken "fleshes out" this "literary superiority" of the KJV (Chapter 9, "Prose Style in the King James Bible" and Chapter 10, "Poetic Effects in the King James Bible"). These are marvelous chapters on what makes the KJV such a powerful and beautiful translation, as Ryken details how the KJV captures the simplicity yet majesty of the Word of God in its various literary forms (history, poetry, etc.). For my purposes I will quote just one part of Ryken's comments from these chapters, where he is referring to the exalted language of the KJV:

But even after we name such things as formal constructions, distinctive vocabulary (whether simple or formal), and sophisticated syntax, we have not accounted for what makes the King James Bible uniquely evocative and moving. Something has fallen like a benediction on the King James Bible, but what that 'something' is remains elusive. Psalm 34:19 begins as follows in the KJV: 'Many are the afflictions of the righteous.' Thinking to improve on the vocabulary and inverted sentence structure of the KJV, modern translations show us by their flatness how elevating the KJV is: 'a righteous man may have many troubles' (NIV); 'the Lord's people may suffer a lot' (CEV); 'people who do what is right may have many problems' (NCV).

Why does it matter that an English Bible possess the kind of exaltation that the KJV displays? To begin, an exalted Bible elevates the mind, heart, and soul in a way that a mundane translation does not.

...In addition to this argument..., we can say something about how an exalted style does justice to the content of the Bible in ways that a

prosaic translation does not. Dwight Macdonald has stated correctly that ‘the religious passion of Jesus and Paul... needs an exalted idiom to be adequately conveyed.’ Likewise with the mystery of the supernatural that pervades the Bible, someone has said that ‘another quality that can fairly be demanded of a Bible is mystery,’ which evaporates in modern translations.

Another reason the majesty of the KJV matters is that the majesty evokes a sense of authority for the Bible. Adam Nicholson has written well on the subject as follows: ‘One of the King James Bible’s most consistent driving forces is the idea of majesty. Its method and its voices are... regal.... Its qualities are those of grace, stateliness, scale, power. There is no desire to please here; only a belief in the enormous and overwhelm-

ing divine authority’ (pp. 152-153).

With these words of Ryken and others (and Ryken continues from this point to quote numerous authors to back up his claims about the KJV!) we are in hearty agreement. During this year of commemorating the KJV’s 400th anniversary I have become personally convinced again that the KJV is the Bible the church needs, especially in this late hour of church history. I say this not as a KJV-only radical, but because the KJV truly is the fruit of the great Reformation of the sixteenth century and because it still today best preserves the authority and dignity of the Word of God in English. May God continue to make it a great blessing to His people throughout the world! ●

Majestie: The King Behind the King James Bible, David Teems. Thomas Nelson, 2010. Pp. 301 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

I have seldom read such a well-written and interesting book on the behind-the-scenes happenings and the actual translation of the King James Version of the Bible. The blurb on the back cover is not exaggerating when it says, “David Teems’ narrative crackles with wit, using a thoroughly modern tongue to reanimate the life of this seventeenth century king—a man at the intersection of political, literary, and religious thought, yet a man of contrasts, dubbed by one French king as ‘the wisest fool in Christendom.’”

Its theme is well expressed in its title, “Majestie.” While the term is intended to apply to King James VI (James I of England), the point of the book is to demonstrate how this “majesty” of a very strange king was carried over into the translation of the King James Version of the Bible. At first thought, the thesis seems to be a dreadful exaggeration; but the author demonstrates his point and argues his case with careful study, insightful analysis, and an

underlying love for the KJV, interspersed with amusing anecdotes.

The most important justification for the proliferation of translations in our day is the need for a Bible written in the everyday language of the common people. Without specifically saying so, Teems rejects that argument as a reason for new translations. It is his claim that the KJV rises above common language spoken by the citizenry of a country, that it does so intentionally and with great skill, and that the result is a Bible, the very character of the translation being a testimony to the unique contents of the book. And in doing so, the author claims that the KJV has come to us in a language that has remained timeless—as understandable today as it was in 1611 when it first came out. It is a book that has “majesty.”

King James, heir to the throne in Scotland, seemingly had everything against him. His mother, Mary, Queen of the Scots, is suspected by historians of having

killed her husband, whom she despised, and marrying another fop of no earthly good. She was a bitter opponent of John Knox and had confrontations with him that have been described as totally exasperating to the queen, but exhibiting the courage of the Reformer of Scotland. As an aside, the author, sadly, despises John Knox and the other Reformers, and so tips his hand to reveal his attitude towards true reformation in the British Isles.

So poor a queen was Mary that her own Parliament finally deposed her and forced her to flee to England. There she stayed until her continuous plotting against Queen Elizabeth forced Elizabeth to kill her. But James never knew his parents, and grew up an orphan.

His appearance did not in any way enhance his dignity. The author closes his prologue with the words: "After wrestling with the Angel of the Lord, Jacob walked away from Peniel with a limp. And so, too, comes our king, our imperial Jack. With a gait obscured by childhood rickets (or a drunken wet-nurse), our sovereign comes to us at a kind of waddle, sidewise and crablike. The same could be said of my

earlier perceptions of him. But perceptions change."

The author, while not denying that James' childhood left an indelible mark on him, nevertheless argues that he was every inch a king—with majesty. He possessed a very sharp intellect, was something of a poet, had a shrewd ability to judge people and his constituency, considered himself a religious person and specially appointed by God to be king, and held to the Stuart conviction of the divine right of kings, that is, that the king is answerable to no one but God.

From the perspective of the Reformation in England and Scotland, James was a less than desirable figure. As I noted, James despised Knox and the other Reformers. He cared not for the doctrines and beliefs of the Presbyterians in Scotland and of the Puritans in England. He wanted no part of Presbyterian church government and favored episcopacy. His saying, "No bishop, no king," summed up his fear of Presbyterianism. I suspect that the author had a great deal of sympathy for James in these respects. James was no friend of Scottish Presbyterianism while king of Scotland and no friend

of Puritanism when, at the death of Elizabeth, he became king of all Britain. Teems would second James' notion. Yet the author claims that the dignity he gave to the office was carried over in his appointment of translators and in his instructions to them for their guidance in translating. In fact, the majesty of James is the real reason for the majesty of the KJV.

Underlying the majesty of the KJV is James' instruction to the translators to remember that the new translation was to be, above all, heard and not read. He insisted that hearing was, in any case, more powerful than reading. He may very well have been correct in this, for God has so ordained that not the reading of the Bible but the lively preaching and hearing of the Word of God is the primary means of grace (see Rom. 10:17—faith cometh by hearing). This instruction was faithfully carried out by the translators, who were not only gifted and able scholars of the original languages, but were also meticulous in their work, constantly reviewing it and checking up on the translations of other groups within the translating committee and in reviewing the translation of the whole.

While the translators did not sacrifice accuracy for readability, they successfully and quite astonishingly successfully combined both—down to the placing of a comma, or the word order of a phrase or clause.

An interesting quote will illustrate this. Rule 1 of James' instructions read: "The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops' Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit." The author goes on to say, "This basically means that if an alteration by a Translator could improve a line—make it sound with a clearer, more refined music—whether the change be but a word or an entire restructuring of a line, or if a better line from the other existing English translations is agreed upon, then the substitution is preferable." (Rule 14 lists these: Tyndale's [William Tyndale], Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitechurch's [Great Bible 1539], and, oddly, the Geneva.) "Truth of the original" refers to the reliable Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

Samuel Ward (Second Cambridge Company [one of the committees assigned a

portion of the Bible, HH]), at the Synod of Dordt in 1618, explained the translation, saying, "Caution was given that an entirely new version was not to be furnished, but an old version, long received by the Church, to be purged from all blasphemies and faults."

In truth, the new Bible was not a translation at all, but a revision. It was a patchwork quilt, with the finest elements of its former voices stitched together. The whole intent was summed up in the preface to the 1611 version of the King James Bible (original spelling).

"Truly (Good Christian Reader) wee neuer thought from the beginning, that we should neede to make a new Translation, nor yet to make of a bad one a good one...but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one, not iustly to be excepted against: that hath bene our indeauour, that our marke."

It was, in essence, a revision of the Bishops' Bible. But such an aged and dense translation gave the Translators a wide berth. Out of the existing English translation they would draw the "one principall good one."

The Bishops' Bible was the default translation. If it could not be bettered, it was to be left alone. The Bishops' was not as good as the Geneva, and nowhere near as popular. The language was lumpy, dense, and difficult to navigate, even to the Elizabethan and Jacobean ear.

Jacobean [the term refers to the age of James' rule, for James was sometimes called "Jake," HH] culture was a culture of the word, a *listening* culture. The Jacobean was saturated in sound. Poetry was an aural fascination, an auricular art. Just like the Jacobean love of excess, this was incorporate in the language as well. The Jacobean had an ear for it. This was the time in which an individual could sit or stand for the two or three, and sometimes four hours it took to enjoy a play. Unless it was a real dog, they remained fixed. Whether it be a "two hours' traffic of our stage," the three-hour sermon, the four-hour *Hamlet* [play of Shakespeare, HH] or James' five-hour delivery on the first day of the {Hampton} Conference, there was a high tolerance for such prolixity (173-174).

I quote this at length because it illustrates clearly the author's point. It is one of the strengths of the KJV that it made use of the translations before it, insofar as this comported with accuracy. It is analogous to God's work of developing doctrine in the church; new insights into the Scriptures arise out of old and sometimes ancient insights, but are never innovations, new ideas cut off from the past. They grow in the fertile soil of the work of the Spirit of Truth always present in the church. So is the KJV, rooted as it was in the Spirit's work in earlier translators. It is one of its strengths. Literary beauty, when coupled with accuracy, is a blessing not to be despised.

Further, that the KJV was made for a "listener" and not a reader gives to it its melody, its rhythm, its cadence, its lofty language that sets it apart from other books. Such work is not a sacrifice of accuracy: indeed, the KJV owes its continuous appeal to a combination of accuracy plus beauty. Today's translations have lost that. They have catered to the readers, not to the listener, and in so doing they have lost accuracy and beauty. They have catered to a TV generation, whose listening

is geared to the slop that comes to us from a mechanical device that passes off material on the level of a third-grade pupil at best, and uses the language of the street—if not worse. Let the minister who, from the pulpit, reads Scripture from the KJV remember the "listenability" of the Bible from which he reads.

While the author is not interested in the majesty of the KJV because it is the translation of the inspired written record of Christ's word itself, it remains a fact that James, I think, had some sense of this; the translators certainly were aware of this, and we may be thankful that the Bible on our book shelves does not sit alongside Bruce Catton's *Terrible Swift Sword* or even the *Iliad* or Plato's *Republic*, but occupies a place by itself.

I cannot refrain from a couple of juicy anecdotes found in the book. The author characterizes Andrewes as being ambivalent, but says that ambivalence also characterized the age,

and that of the new king. It [ambivalence, HH] is theater. It is great theater. Is it sincere? Absolutely. But it is also, as Shakespeare phrased it, "the sweet smoke of rhetoric."

During the plague that killed so many of London's inhabitants, Launcelot Andrewes, a leading figure among the translators, preached that the righteous would be kept safe and that the dread disease was God's punishment of sin. But at the height of the plague, Andrewes could not be found. The author continues: "This duplicity did not go unnoticed. One man, Henock Clapham, wrote a pamphlet on the issue. Pamphlets were always a bit of fun. The long titles, the short pithy bursts of venom. In Clapham's pamphlet, *Epistle Discoursing upon the Present Pestilence*, he turns up the volume and accuses Andrewes of hypocrisy, of preaching one thing and doing the opposite, of hiding beneath an elm tree, very Jonah-like, and saving his own skin.

Clapham asserted that Londoners should behave as though the plague were not contagious, that there was no need to flee, that it was a disease caused by sin. "If death came because of sin and not contagion," he reasoned, "why would the innocent have to flee the city?" The outcome? Clapham served almost two years in jail. "To suggest that the Dean of West-

minster was a self-serving cheat was insubordination and unacceptable." He was forced to sign a retraction, one that was written by Andrewes, of course. Clapham refused, but did agree to a compromise (after spending much time behind bars). The compromise said there were actually *two* plagues. Only one was contagious. The other was a reaction to sin. *Ah, the sweet smoke*" (196, 197).

Another interesting story is told of one of the four Puritan men appointed to the company of the translators.

Lawrence Chaderton, of the First Westminster Company, was one of the four Puritans invited to the Hampton Court Conference. He was appointed Dean of Christ's College, Cambridge, and Master of Emmanuel College, a Puritan institution founded to "train up godly ministers." Chaderton was disowned by his father for becoming a Calvinist while a student at Cambridge. His father wrote him, saying he would cut him off completely, that he would have nothing to fall back on, "if you do not renounce the new sect which you have joined." He en-

closed one shilling for his son to buy a wallet, then said, “Go and beg.” Laurence bought the wallet, and got for himself a full university scholarship. He became a superb linguist, proficient in Hebrew, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and French.

Chaderton was said to be one of the great preachers of his day. He had a “clear and pleasing” voice, “of wonderful flexibility, accompanied by a great dignity of manner.” He was apparently so good that those who heard him could not get enough. On one occasion, he had preached for two hours. He stopped only out of courtesy, not to try anyone’s patience. The entire congre-

gation cried out, “For God’s sake, go on! Go on! We beg you!” He did just that, and for another hour.

Imagine that happening today in a congregation of clock watchers. But it was a “listening” culture.

And so, the conclusion of the matter. The author has a high regard for the KJV. He has such a high regard because of its literary qualities. We too have a high regard for the KJV. Our regard is the result of God’s great work in wedding beautiful and memorable literature with the word of God that abides forever. ●

King James, His Bible, and Its Translators, Laurence M. Vance. Pensacola: Vance Publications, 2006. Pp. 167 (paper). [Reviewed by Herman Hanko.]

Dr. Vance has brought together fourteen essays he has written over the years in defense of the King James Version of the Bible. The essays are roughly divided into four groups. The first group, composed of four essays, deals with the history that resulted in the KJV and the translators

who did the work. The second group of three essays discusses the translators’ finished product. The third group of two essays examines the KJV in the context of the history of the English Bible. And the fourth group, composed of six essays, examines questions relating to the KJV.

The author uses many interesting quotes from other writers as he develops his material. One such quote, dealing with the accuracy of the KJV, is from Ward Allen, who summarizes the whole translation process:

Each translator completed his revision of a chapter week by week, and each company forged a common revision by comparing these private revisions. This revision being completed, a company circulated its work, book by book, among the other companies. From this circulation there resulted revisions, made in the light of objections raised to the work of a company, and an excursus upon any objection which the original company did not agree to. Then the translators circulated their work among the learned men, who were not official translators, and revised their work in view of suggestions from these men. Now the translators had to circulate these revisions among the other companies. Then, they prepared a final text. This final text they submitted to the general meeting in London, which spent nine months compounding disagreements among companies (49, 50).

Such laborious and careful work could not help but produce the most accurate translation possible.

The author begins Essay 5 with the words:

The King James Bibles that we see in abundance not only on bookshelves, desks, and coffee tables, but in bedrooms, living rooms, bathrooms, hotel rooms, pockets, purses, cars, and church pews, can be found in all manner of shapes, sizes, bindings, colors, and formats. The book is so ubiquitous that it is hard to imagine a time when there weren't any copies in existence (53).

The KJV has always had its critics. One of the earliest critics of the new version was Hugh Broughton (1549-1612)—note the date of his death, one year after the publication of the KJV. He wrote, as quoted by Vance, "I will suffer no scholar in the world to cross me in Hebrew and Greek, when I am sure I have the truth." In 1612 Broughton wrote, "A Censure of the late translation for our churches: sent unto a Right Worshipfull Knight, Attendant upon the King." In that work, again according to Vance,

Broughton stated that he would “rather be rent in pieces with wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches.”

While much of the material found in the essays is available from many, many other books, the author does raise a few interesting questions. One such question the author raises is in connection with the fact that the KJV is sometimes called “The Authorized Version.” He considers whether this authorization means that the translation had James I’s approval; whether it was authorized because it was ordered to be read in the churches; whether the authorization came from the fact that the common people accepted it; or whether it is authorized by God Himself. He concludes that the word “Authorized” was attached to the translation because the work was ordered by James I, king of England, Scotland, and Ireland.

The author, in another essay, asks the question why so many newer translations attached to the name the word “Standard,” as, for example, “The Revised Standard Bible.” The author considers the addition of the word “Standard” to be intended by the translators to underscore the superiority of

their translations. But he himself seems to be of the opinion that the KJV is itself the standard of all other translations, of which there have been many.

The author claims that a new translation comes out about every six months. He is of the opinion that the KJV is the real standard because it is still the best translation from the viewpoint of accuracy, fluency of speech, understandability, timelessness of language, and beauty of formulation.

Reference is made here and there to the claim that the KJV is itself the inspired word of God. Sometimes this appears in the writings of those who claim “onlyism” for the KJV, that is, the claim that the KJV is the only good translation, and sometimes there are those who claim that the KJV is infallibly inspired. Without in any way besmirching the KJV, the author rejects these ideas and claims infallibility only for the Autographa.

This position has been criticized by Bible critics on the grounds that no Autographa exist—which is true. But the answer to these critics is what the Westminster Confession says about the Autographa, that they

are “by his [God’s] singular care and providence, kept pure in all ages, and therefore authentical.”

The KJV is not an outdated translation, intended to be replaced every twenty years or so. When God’s people hold the KJV in their hands, they have the very Word of God itself. They must not and need not doubt that truth.



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