

The Bedell/Boyle Lecture 2010

# The King James Bible Four Hundred Years On

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## **INTRODUCTION**

### The Bedell/Boyle Lecture Series

The Bedell Boyle Lecture Series is named in honour of the Hon Robert Boyle (1626-1691), who made a large contribution to the printing and publishing of the Bible for Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and also to propagating Christianity in America and Malaya. He was President of the Royal Society as well as being the distinguished scientist of Boyle's Law.

It is also intended to honour William Bedell (1571-1642), Bishop of Kilmore and Ardagh, who is famous for an Irish translation of the First (Old) Testament and for Bedell's Bible, which was published in 1685 and with which Boyle was concerned. Each year, a speaker of world stature, or who has demonstrated national leadership in a particular field, is asked to speak on a topic relating some aspect of the Holy Scriptures to current developments.

The 2010 Lecture was given by Dr David Hutchinson Edgar, in Purcell House, All Hallows College, Dublin on 10 February 2011.

#### Biographical Note

Dr David Hutchinson Edgar has taught New Testament Studies at several third-level institutions, including Trinity College, Dublin, and the Church of Ireland Theological College. He has also worked at the Chester Beatty Library, Dublin, where he prepared the first full translation into English of the Library's New Testament Greek manuscripts.

## THE BEDELL-BOYLE LECTURE 2010

### The King James Bible – Four Hundred Years On

This year, 2011, marks the quatercentenary of the publication of the King James Bible. The King James Bible, or more correctly the King James version of the Bible, is perhaps something of a misnomer, as although King James gave the order for a new translation to be prepared, the suggestion was not his, and the painstaking work of translation and revision certainly was not. Likewise, to refer to this translation as the Authorised Version is also something of a misnomer, as although the making of the translation was done on royal authority, there is no evidence that the finished work was ever officially authorised for use. Be that as it may, there is nevertheless no doubting that this translation of the Bible became one of the greatest landmarks of works published in the English language, which has not just survived, but flourished in print and in use for four centuries, and whose turn of phrase has seeped indelibly into the English language.<sup>1</sup>

In its origins, the King James version is not a stand-alone achievement, but part of a process of translation which encompassed worthy precedents in the presentation of the Bible in the English language, and which interfaced with similar processes underway elsewhere in Europe at the time. At the time of its preparation, it was quite possibly unforeseen how durable and influential the translation would prove to be. Like its predecessors and its counterparts on the continent, it was very much a product of the intertwined religious and political controversies of the age. An appreciation of both these dimensions is necessary to understand the origins of the translation.

#### Early English Bible Translations

Following the drawn-out conflicts of the hundred years' war between France and England, English had displaced French as the language of the ruling elites in England, in a fusion of the older Anglo-Saxon tongue with strong Norman-French influences. Manuscript fragments of several translations of parts of the Bible survive in this Middle English, but the great achievement of biblical translation in this age was that of John Wyclif, who instigated the first complete translation of the Bible into English, from the standard Latin Vulgate text. He was Master of Balliol College, Oxford, and a friend of powerful nobles such as John of Gaunt, and it remains uncertain how much, if any, of the translation was actually done by Wyclif himself, with his New Testament completed around 1380, and the Old Testament between 1382 and 1384, shortly before his death. Wyclif held religious views which foreshadowed the Reformation, critical of the doctrines and authority of the papacy, and possibly as a result of his popularity among religious dissidents such as the Lollards, his Bible was suppressed. A decree was issued at the instigation of Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1408, banning the making of unauthorised English translations of the Bible.

<sup>1</sup> A number of accounts of the making of the KJV are readily available: Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The story of the King James Bible and how it changed a nation, a language and a culture*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 2001; Adam Nicolson, *The Power and the Glory: Jacobean England and the making of the King James Bible*, London, Harper Collins, 2003; Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The story of the King James Version 1611-2011*, Oxford University Press, 2010. Recently published but unavailable at the time of writing is David Norton, *The King James Bible: A short history from Tyndale to today*, Cambridge University Press, 2011. At a more detailed level of scholarship see David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, Cambridge University Press, 2005

Despite this proscription, nearly 150 manuscript copies of parts of the Wyclif Bible survive, many of them large works which clearly belonged to members of the nobility, including Kings Henry VI and VII. So the legacy of this period is twofold: on the one hand, the survival of a significant number of manuscripts of the Wyclif Bible, in spite of its suppression, indicates a clear interest in an English translation, but on the other hand, the prohibition on English translations scuppered any development of a tradition of translation at this point, and would prove to have serious ramifications for those who eventually would seek to promote the existence of an English Bible.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Sixteenth Century: William Tyndale and his Successors**

With the development of printing technology in the second half of the fifteenth century, the story of the circulation of the Bible took a new turn. Now, multiple copies of the Bible could be produced with greater speed and economy than ever previously. This was of course true of the Latin Vulgate, but it also facilitated the wider circulation of the Bible both in its original Hebrew and Greek and in new vernacular translations. The first German translation from Latin was printed in 1466, and a French translation was published in 1478. The first printed Hebrew Bible was published in 1488, and Erasmus's first edition of the Greek New Testament was printed in 1516. This coincided with the Humanist scholars' revived interest in the ancient languages, and the beginnings of a recognition that the Vulgate text need not be accepted as a given. It was, after all, itself a translation, and Erasmus's comparison of the Latin with the Greek original convinced him that the Vulgate had serious flaws in places. His Greek New Testament was based on a critical comparison of a number of Greek manuscripts, none of which, unfortunately, was particularly ancient, or of particularly good quality. Nevertheless, his work represented an important step in challenging the status of the Vulgate. It further coincided with the Reformers' urge to provide vernacular translations of the Bible in place of the Vulgate, and Erasmus's New Testament provided a foundation for translations not from the Latin translation of the Roman church, rejected by the Reformers, but from the original Greek.

As these developments were taking place on the European mainland, translating the Bible into English without the authority of the church remained proscribed in England. But there was certainly already an interest in having an English Bible in some quarters, and this interest grew as reformation ideas began to find sympathisers in England also. It was with the efforts of William Tyndale that the next steps in the creation of the English Bible unfolded, beginning a trajectory of translation that eventually fed into the King James version nearly a century later. Tyndale was born in 1490, and studied in Oxford, where he came in contact with the ideas of the Reformation.<sup>3</sup> Having taken up a chaplaincy in his native Gloucestershire, he is reputed to have expressed his vision of English scriptures accessible to the populace at large, retorting to an opponent in debate, "If God spare my life, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the scriptures than thou dost." As this vision took hold, he travelled to London to seek the patronage of Bishop Tunstall for the translation of the Bible into English. Permission was not forthcoming, however, and he abandoned the possibility of pursuing his mission in England with church approval, and went to Germany, where he completed the translation of the New Testament into English in 1525. His first attempt to print his

<sup>2</sup> On the Wycliffite Bible and its aftermath, see David Lawton, *Faith, Text and History*, London, Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1990, 51-61.

<sup>3</sup> The most comprehensive account of Tyndale's life and work is David Daniell, *William Tyndale: A Biography*, Yale University Press, 1994.

translation in Cologne was aborted due to the hostile intervention of anti-reformation activists. Tyndale fled with his work to the Lutheran city of Worms, where the first printed English New Testament was published in 1526. Some three thousand copies were produced, but of these, very little remains today, such was the vehemence with which the church authorities in England sought to destroy them. Tyndale's work was decried as heretical, and copies of his translation were ceremonially burned at St Paul's Cross, accompanied by a sermon from Bishop Tunstall. But Tyndale and his supporters were undeterred, and continued to print, while Tyndale continued his work of translation. The Pentateuch - Genesis to Deuteronomy - was published in 1530, followed by Jonah in 1531, and a revised New Testament the following year. In 1535, he was treacherously lured from his home in Antwerp, seized by the anti-reformation authorities, and burnt at the stake in October 1536. While his work may have been incomplete, his achievement was significant.<sup>4</sup> He had provided an English New Testament, translated from Erasmus's Greek editions, with some influence from Luther's German translation. The annotations to the translation bear stronger witness to the influence of Luther, another consideration bound to incur the abhorrence of the English authorities.

Tyndale might have been denounced as a heretic, but events in England had taken a twist with Henry VIII's split with the Church of Rome. In 1535, Miles Coverdale, later bishop of Exeter, published an English Bible, dedicated to the King and apparently backed by the King's advisor, Thomas Cromwell. The second edition of Coverdale's bible, two years later, bore the inscription on the title page: "Set forth with the King's most gracious license." The ban of 1408 on making an English translation had at last been overcome. Coverdale, however, was not so much an original translator as a reviser: his New Testament follows Tyndale's translation quite closely, while he also made use of the reformer Zwingli's German Zurich Bible, the Vulgate, and several other translations.<sup>5</sup>

Around the same time, in 1537, another Bible, also "set forth with the King's most gracious license" appeared under the name of one Thomas Matthew. Thomas Matthew is otherwise unknown, but the name seems to have been an alias of John Rogers, a friend and associate of Tyndale. The version is deeply indebted to Tyndale: New Testament and Pentateuch follow Tyndale closely, and while much of the rest of the Old Testament is based on Coverdale, the books from Joshua to Chronicles are in a previously unknown translation. The style, however, resembles that of Tyndale, and it is known he asked permission for the use of his Hebrew books while in prison. It seems probable that Rogers managed to smuggle out this final contribution from Tyndale, and incorporate it into the new edition under the inoffensive name of Matthew.

How aware Cromwell and Cranmer, who supported the Matthew version, were of its close links to the work of Tyndale is not entirely certain. But Henry still considered Tyndale an outcast, and it seems reasonable to assume that he might not have taken kindly to any discovery that he had been duped into licensing Tyndale's translation under another name. Possibly for this reason, Coverdale was invited to produce a new version of the English Bible. This further revision resulted in the so-called Great Bible,

<sup>4</sup> David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature: Volume 1, From Antiquity to 1700*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 85: "Tyndale's English became the model for Biblical English, and he is indeed the father of English biblical translations."

<sup>5</sup> For Coverdale, see J.F. Mozley, *Coverdale and his Bibles*, London, Lutterworth, 1953; Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 1, 107-113; David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its history and influence*, Yale University Press, 2003, 173-189. Norton's and Daniell's works also analyse in detail other sixteenth century English translations, including those of Matthew (Rogers) the Bishop's Bible, and the Douai-Rheims Bible.

published in 1539. Cromwell ordered a copy to be installed in every parish church, so in a sense, it is Coverdale's 1539 revision which perhaps should be called the authorised version, as it is the only English translation ever to have been sanctioned for use in this way. The Great Bible seems to have been, as its name suggests, a large-format edition particularly suited to use in churches, but less suitable for private ownership. In all, seven editions were printed between 1539 and 1541, and the fact that the Great Bible version of the Psalms continued to be used in the Anglican Book of Common Prayer right up to the twentieth century is a testament to its successful acceptance.

The eventual accession of Mary to the throne and the restoration of the Roman Catholic church under her rule brought an interruption to the propagation of the Bible by reformers: Cranmer and Rogers were executed, while Coverdale fled to Geneva. It was in Geneva that the next developments of the English Bible took place. The city was a centre of Reformed teaching and scholarship under the leadership of John Calvin, and thousands of refugees fled there from Mary's rule. In 1557, a revision of the New Testament was printed in Geneva, in a small format and using roman type. This version had a foreword by Calvin, and was also the first English Bible to introduce verse numbers. A further revision was produced by a group of puritan scholars, combined with a revised Old Testament in 1560. These versions largely used as their base text the Matthew New Testament and the Great Bible Old Testament, both of which were themselves heavily dependent on Tyndale's translation, although under the influence of the biblical scholarship of Theodore Beza, the Geneva Bible was probably superior to its predecessors in many respects, particularly in providing the first original translation from Hebrew to English of those parts of the Old Testament not translated by Tyndale.<sup>6</sup> Significantly, its small format and easily readable type ensured it would circulate widely, and with extensive notes generally influenced by Calvinist theology, it became particularly popular among puritans.

The popularity of the Geneva Bible was less welcome among some strands of the episcopal leadership of the English church, and the perceived need for a further revision to counter its influence resulted in the Bishops' Bible of 1568, produced under the supervision of Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, and prepared with the use of the Geneva Bible, as well as other translations. While the Bishops' Bible replaced the Great Bible for use in many parish churches, it did nothing to displace the popularity of the Geneva Bible in puritan circles.<sup>7</sup>

### **James VI and the Origins of the New Version**

The succession of James VI of Scotland to the English throne as James I raised hopes among puritans that the new ruler might be sympathetic to their cause, given that the church in Scotland was much more heavily invested with puritan and Calvinist ideas than the English church was. A puritan petition to James on his accession in 1603 lamented various unbiblical facets of the Church of England, such as the wearing of elaborate robes by clergy and the making of the sign of the cross during services. Notwithstanding the

<sup>6</sup> On the Geneva Bible, see Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 275-319; G. Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible*, Manchester, Carcanet Press, 1982, 89-136 pays particular attention to the importance of its translation from Hebrew and the impact of versification.

<sup>7</sup> Opinions vary on the quality of the Bishops' Bible version, Hammond, *Making of the English Bible*, 143, is highly critical: "For the most part the Bishops' Bible is either a lazy and ill-informed collation of what had gone before, or, in its original parts, the work of third-rate scholars and second-rate writers." F.F. Bruce, *The English Bible: A history of translations from the earliest English versions to the New English Bible*, London: Lutterworth, 1970, 94, is more generous: "Had the Geneva Bible never been produced, the Bishops' Bible would have been the best thus far."

more Presbyterian church order which prevailed in Scotland, James was not particularly enamoured of puritan beliefs, and is reputed to have disliked the Geneva Bible, at least partly because of the undermining in its notes of the divine right of Kings, a concept cherished by James. Nevertheless, the new king had no desire to perpetuate or exacerbate the differences between the puritan and Anglican parties, and announced a conference to be held at Hampton Court palace the following year.

The conference duly convened on January 14th 1604, with three broad areas for discussion, namely, the Book of Common Prayer and divine service, excommunication in ecclesiastical courts, and the provision of “fit and able ministers for Ireland.” Only a minority of those selected to attend represented the puritan perspective. As far as the issues intended for discussion are concerned, the conference achieved no meaningful results, but its great and unexpected contribution was the decision to authorise a new version of the Bible in English. In the course of the proceedings, one of the puritan group, John Reynolds, President of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, complained of a number of inadequacies in the existing translations, suggesting the need for replacement with a superior translation. It is unclear if Reynolds may perhaps have hoped to secure the authorisation of the Geneva Bible in place of Great or Bishops’ Bibles, but given James’ supposed doubts about the Geneva version, any such hopes were unlikely to succeed.<sup>8</sup> The suggestion, however, of a new translation seems to have appealed to the King, possibly seeing in a fresh version of the Bible an instrument to address and appease both parties.

It was decided that the work should be given not to an individual or a small group, as had been the case with previous translations and revisions, but should be carried out by a large committee of the leading scholars of the day, working in three centres, Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster, and exchanging the fruits of their work. Two companies of translators met in each location: the Oxford companies worked on the Gospels, Acts, Revelation and the prophetic books of the Old Testament, those in Westminster were responsible for Genesis to 2 Kings and the New Testament epistles, while those in Cambridge were responsible for the remainder of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha. The sparse surviving manuscript evidence for the translation process itself suggests that the work may well have been subdivided further within the companies. A number of instructions, generally quite conservative in tone, were laid down for the translators, which had an important bearing on the shape of the outcome.<sup>9</sup>

The first of these laid down for “The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the Bishops’ Bible, to be followed, and as little altered as the original will permit.” The impact of this would be clear: the new version would stand firmly in the tradition of Tyndale’s translation. The impact of Tyndale was scarcely lessened by the fact that the rules provided for comparison of the text with five other versions, all of which also ultimately derived from Tyndale: “These translations to be used, when they agree better with the text than the Bishops’ Bible: Tyndale’s, Coverdale’s, Matthew’s, Whitchurch’s,<sup>10</sup> Geneva. In practice, not just these five, but others including the Roman Catholic Douai-Rheims translation and translations into other contemporary European languages were also consulted. Differences between the companies on particular passages were to be noted and resolved at a general meeting at the end of the process. Provision was made

<sup>8</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 433-4, questions whether James was really as averse to the Geneva Bible as many writers on the subject assert.

<sup>9</sup> The fifteen rules for the translators are provided by Norton, *Textual History*, 7-8; see also Nicolson, *The Power and the Glory*: 72-83.

<sup>10</sup> “Whitchurch’s” refers to the Great Bible, designated by the name of its publisher.

for consultation on difficult passages with scholars outside the companies of the translators, and for learned clergy to submit their observations to the any of the three companies. Between seven and ten translators sat in each company, giving a probable total of forty-seven men.

The instructions stipulated that the traditional chapter divisions were to be retained, and that the names of the books of the Bible and other proper names were to be as commonly used. Another significant requirement was for “The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, as the word church, not to be translated congregation.” This was significant, as it meant that the new translation would reflect, and thus in a sense legitimise episcopal, rather than puritan, church structures in its vocabulary. Further, the translation was to have no marginal notes or commentary attached, thus removing the potential for such interpretative elaboration of the meaning of the text to become a battleground between Anglican and puritan. The only marginal annotation permitted was for the explanation of difficult Greek or Hebrew words, and for the internal cross-referencing of the text.

Forty unbound copies of the 1602 edition of the Bishops’ Bible were provided for the use of the translators by the King’s printer, Robert Barker. The work of the various companies seems to have got underway promptly, and seems to have been largely completed by 1607. In a letter dated 5th December 1608, William Eyre, apparently one of the Cambridge Old Testament company, wrote to the future Archbishop James Ussher, at the time chancellor of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, seeking the return of his annotated copy of the text:

“In my absence from Cambridge, there was order taken from the King’s majesty by the archbishop of Canterbury that the translation of the Bible shall be finished and printed as soon as may be. Two of every company are chosen to revise and compare the whole at London. Hereupon I am earnestly requested to get again that copy of our part which I lent you for D. Daniel his use; for albeit there be two fair written copies out of it yet there will be use of it because I noted in the margins by *rashe tevoth* of the places which were doubted of. And this is not in the others.”<sup>11</sup>

The Irish connection here is of course also of interest: D. Daniel would seem to be Dr William Daniel (Uilliam O Domhnaill), the translator of the New Testament and the Prayer Book into Irish, and a colleague of Ussher in St. Patrick’s Cathedral, where he held the position of treasurer. It is possible that he was considering an Irish translation of the Old Testament, hence his borrowing of the Cambridge text, or the loan may have been to assist his work on the prayer book translation. It is not known if either of these Irish scholars offered any comments on the draft translation themselves, and it is also unclear if the loan of Eyre’s copy represents part of a wider process of consultation with eminent scholars of the day, or was simply a courtesy on Eyre’s part following the conclusion of the draft translation by his company.

It seems that representatives of each of the companies met for the final revision of the drafts in London in 1609. One complete annotated text of the Bishops’ Bible survives, though in fact this may represent work originally deriving from several companies and only subsequently bound together. The revision apparently continued into 1610, though it is possible that different people were involved in different parts of the work at this stage. Unfortunately, there is insufficient evidence to have a clear picture of how the companies and the final revision actually operated. David Norton summarises as follows:

<sup>11</sup> Bodleian Manuscript Rawlinson, C.849, folios 262v-263r, cited by Norton, *Textual History*, 13.

“Various hints and gaps in the evidence, it seems to me, point towards a more muddled picture wherein the KJB stands partway between the orderly committee work of the Revised Version and the individualism of the Bishops’ Bible. Small group and perhaps individual work contributed to final product, and the rules for the work, from which an ordered picture is easily inferred, were not as literally and uniformly followed as has been imagined.”<sup>12</sup>

The new translation was first printed four hundred years ago in 1611, by the King's printer, Robert Barker, who essentially had a monopoly on the publication of the new Bible. The first edition, a large volume in the old black-letter type, was later followed by a smaller, roman-type edition. A preface, probably composed by Miles Smith, defends the necessity of translation from Greek and Hebrew into the “vulgar tongues”, replete with references to the Church Fathers, especially St Jerome, translator of the Latin Vulgate.<sup>13</sup> In it, the debt to previous translations is acknowledged: “we are so far off from condemning any of their labours that travailed before us in this kind ... that we acknowledge them to have been raised up of God, for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance.” The new translation is presented as an improvement to the highest standard attainable, of the works of previous translators: “whatsoever is sound already ... the same will shine as gold more brightly, being rubbed and polished; also, if anything be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the original, the same may be corrected, and the truth set in place.” Or again: “we never thought from the beginning that we should need 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 principal one.” The defence of the accuracy of translation is of course a principal concern, but the preface also makes clear that stylistic considerations also influenced the final text, and the freedom to represent the same Hebrew or Greek words with different English equivalents, while rendering the sense accurately, is staunchly defended: “we cannot follow a better pattern for elocution than God himself; therefore he using divers words, in his holy writ, and indifferently for one thing in nature: we, if we will not be superstitious, may use the same liberty in our English versions out of Hebrew and Greek.”

The quality of various print runs varied, and emendations were introduced into subsequent editions to correct errors in previous ones.<sup>14</sup> The first folio-size edition became known as the “He-Bible” because of the translation of Ruth 3:15 as “and he went into the city” while its successor, the so-called “She-Bible” and subsequent editions correct this to “and she went into the city.” A 1631 edition omitted the word “not” from Exodus 20:14, earning it the title of the “Wicked Bible” for the resulting injunction: “Thou shalt commit adultery.” And one of the early editions produced by Oxford University Press mistakenly printed the heading “the parable of the vinegar” over the parable of the vineyard. Thus a considerable process of correction continued through the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with the text as we now know it based on the editions of the 1760’s, in which the spelling was modernised.

Given the status the King James version subsequently achieved, it might be expected that the new translation would have attained overnight success. This, however, was not the

<sup>12</sup> Norton, *Textual History*, 27. On the companies’ work and the preparation of the final text, see Norton, , 11-45

<sup>13</sup> Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 1, 147, contrasts the style of the preface with that of the translation itself, observing that “it seems that revision and translation have forced on the translators something lower, possibly much lower, than their idea of good writing.”

<sup>14</sup> Norton, *Textual History*, 62-102, gives a detailed account of the various editions.

case. Although the Bishops' and Great Bibles had ceased to be printed, the Geneva Bible remained popular, especially among puritans, and thousands of copies continued to be imported. Where doctrinal argument failed to win over adherents of the Geneva version to the new translation, the Archbishop of Canterbury in the 1630's, William Laud, put forward a new strategy.<sup>15</sup> The use of foreign Bibles, swelling the coffers of other nations while English printers fell into poverty, was decried for its lack of patriotism, and loyal English citizens were urged to support their own. Surprisingly, perhaps, the strategy seems to have had an impact, and the circulation of the Geneva Bible fell off. The King James translation itself was not particularly offensive to moderate puritan sensibilities, and a few editions of the King James text with the Geneva Bible notes, cherished by puritans, were produced. James' insistence that the new translation should have no annotated commentary of its own paid off, and the version proved capable of acceptance in wider circles than just the episcopal church. More radical puritans continued to prefer the Geneva Bible, and Laud, like King Charles I, fell foul of the puritan parliament and was executed in 1645.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the rise of the puritan commonwealth from the turmoil of the civil war under Oliver Cromwell did not see a revival in the fortunes of the Geneva Bible over against the King James Bible, and the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 assured the status of the King James version as the definitive English translation<sup>17</sup> at a time when association with monarchy had become attractive again.

### **The Text of the King James Bible: Tyndale's Legacy**

Although nearly forty translations of the Bible, or parts of it, into English were published between the start of the eighteenth century and the publication of the Revised Version in 1881, none of these ever achieved a widespread circulation. Many of them were idiosyncratic, or produced to reflect the views of religious non-conformists such as Unitarians. The Revised Version represented the first serious and concerted attempt to replace the King James text. Before examining that process, however, it is appropriate to look at the language of the King James Bible, acclaimed by John Livingstone Lowes in 1936, in an oft-quoted phrase, as "the noblest monument of English prose."

The translators of the King James version were instructed to remain as faithful as possible to the Bishops' Bible, which they used as their base text in its 1602 edition. The Bishops' Bible, however, was itself part of a tradition of translation that stretched back to William Tyndale's translations in the 1520s and 1530s. A small number of examples will suffice by way of illustration. First, John 14:2-3:

In Tyndale's 1534 version: "In my father's house are many mansions. If it were not so I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you I will come again and receive you even unto myself, that where I am there may ye be also."

Coverdale's version of the same verses shows his dependence on Tyndale: "In my father's house are many dwellings. If it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare the place for you. And though I go to prepare the place for you, yet will I come again, and receive you unto myself, that ye may be where I am."

<sup>15</sup> See McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 280-285.

<sup>16</sup> On this period, see Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth Century Revolution*. Oxford University Press, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 488, notes that there were no new English translations in the half-century from 1660 to 1710, while 237 editions of the King James version were printed

And the Bishops' Bible: "In my father's house, are many dwelling places: If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you, [even] unto myself: that where I am, there may ye be also." While the Bishops' Bible retains some of Coverdale's revisions of Tyndale, it also reverts to some of Tyndale's original renderings. The Geneva Bible, likewise, can be seen to derive in essence from Tyndale: "In my Father's house are many dwelling places: if it were not so, I would have told you: I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there may ye be also."

And finally, the King James version: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."

These verses illustrate the strong strand of continuity running through from Tyndale to the King James Bible. One of the great strengths of the new version was the fact that much of its text was actually very similar to the versions it was intended to supplant, and so rather than sounding uncomfortably new, it in fact sounded reassuringly familiar. Another passage, however, shows somewhat more variation among the versions, with more in the way of doctrinal interpretation at stake Romans 3:23-25 are key verses in the reformed teaching of justification by faith. In Tyndale's version, they read as follows: "For all have sinned, and lack the praise that is of valour before God: but are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God hath made a seat of mercy through faith in his blood..." The phrase "seat of mercy" is a more or less literal translation of the German word coined by Luther (*Gnadenstuhl*), translating the word used in both Hebrew and Greek for the lid of the ark of the covenant, sprinkled with blood in the day of atonement ritual described in Leviticus 16.

In Coverdale's version, we find a slightly different English version of Luther's word: "whom God hath set forth for a Mercyseat through faith in his blood."

The Geneva Bible, however, renders verse 25 differently: "For all have sinned, and are deprived of the glory of God, And are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, Whom God hath set forth to be a reconciliation through faith in his blood." The perhaps somewhat ill-defined "mercyseat" is replaced with "reconciliation." The Bishops' Bible also shows its own preference at this point, perhaps in turn responding to the Geneva version: "For all have sinned, and are destitute of the glory of God, Justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood."

"Propitiation" implies a stronger interpretation of Christ's death as a sacrificial offering, and here the King James version retains the Bishops' usage: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood."

The fact that the King James version is heavily indebted to older translations and revisions also means that even at the time of its publication, its language had a certain archaic quality. For example, the second person singular (thou, etc.) and plural (you, etc.) pronoun forms are properly distinguished from each other throughout the King James version, although the distinction was falling out of use in everyday speech, as can be seen from the other great landmark of early seventeenth century English, the works of

Shakespeare. For example, in act one, scene one of Hamlet, two soldiers converse on the roof of the castle:

Francisco: You come most carefully upon your hour.

Bernardo: Tis now struck twelve; get thee to bed, Francisco. F: For this relief much thanks; tis bitter cold, And I am sick at heart. B: Have you had a quiet guard? F: Not a mouse stirring.

In these lines, the plural form “you” is used as the singular, as we continue to use it today, though there is one usage of the proper singular form in “Get thee to bed.”

The literary impact of the King James Bible cannot be said to be in providing some kind of widely circulating standard of good English, as it can be seen from the contemporary works of Shakespeare that English was continuing to evolve. Its far greater contribution came in the rendering into English of idioms, images and distinctive turns of phrase from the Hebrew and Greek, which became assimilated into everyday English usage, such as the Hebrew idiom of “from time to time” or “to go from strength to strength” or, again, the imagery of “sour grapes”, “the apple of my eye” or “the writing on the wall.” This type of influence on the development of the English language is as much a result of use and familiarity as it is of literary quality. As one author has put it: “The immense influence of the King James Bible lay in the fact that it was the only biblical translation known by a culture that was generally well-disposed towards the public and private reading of the Bible.”<sup>18</sup>

In fact, praise for the literary qualities of the King James version seems to grow with distance in time from the translation. Eighteenth-century scholars bemoaned the shortcomings of its language; in 1725, Edward Wells described it as “so very uncouth and harsh as not readily to be understood by any reader, on account of its being so very different from our common way of speaking in like cases”.<sup>19</sup> In 1768, one Edward Harwood published what he entitled “*A Liberal Translation of the New Testament: Being an attempt to translate the Sacred Writings with the same Freedom, Spirit and Elegance with which other English Translations of the Greek Classics have lately been executed,*” acknowledging, nevertheless, that “the bald and barbarous language of the old vulgar version hath acquired a remarkable sacredness from length of time and custom”.<sup>20</sup> Popular familiarity with the King James version gave it an acceptance and authority that works like Harwood’s could not hope to rival, and its role in providing something of a literary and linguistic standard at a popular level had already been recognised positively by Jonathan Swift some decades earlier: “Those books [the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer], being perpetually read in churches, have proved a kind of standard for language, especially to the common people ... I am persuaded that the translators of the English Bible were masters of an English style much fitter for that work than we see in our present writings, which I take to be owing to the simplicity that runs through the whole.”<sup>21</sup>

Through most of the nineteenth century, the King James version was incontestably established as the English Bible, and laments over the inferior qualities of its language

<sup>18</sup> McGrath, *In the Beginning*, 304.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Wells, *An Help for the more easy and clear Understanding of the Holy Scriptures*, preface to the *Old Testament vol. 2*, (Oxford, 1725), 11, quoted by David Norton, *A History of the Bible as Literature: Volume 2. From 1700 to the Present Day*, Cambridge University Press, 1993, 36.

<sup>20</sup> On Harwood’s “Liberal Translation” see Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 2, 85-88.

<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Swift, *A proposal for correcting, improving and ascertaining the English tongue* (1712), in Herbert Davis (ed.), *The Prose Works of Jonathan Swift* Vol. IV, Oxford, Blackwell, 1957, 14. On popular acceptance of the King James version, see Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 2, 42-52.

and style receded from view, to be replaced with a generally positive evaluation in these regards. C.S. Lewis attributed this acclamation of the literary virtues of the King James version to the rise of the Romantic movement, with its admiration for the primitive: “The primitive simplicity of a world in which kings could be shepherds, the abrupt and mysterious manner of the prophets, the violent passions of bronze-age fighting men, the background of tents and flocks and desert and mountain, the village homeliness of Our Lord’s parables and metaphors now first, I suspect, became a positive literary aspect.”<sup>22</sup>

### **Developments in Biblical Scholarship: Moves towards New Translations**

By the middle of the nineteenth century there was growing scholarly criticism of the so-called “Received Text” of the New Testament, represented by Erasmus’ Greek New Testament and the King James translation. As early as 1625, the great 5th century biblical manuscript, Codex Alexandrinus, had been presented to the King, and the efforts of scholars like Tischendorf and Tregelles had brought further ancient manuscripts to light, casting doubt on the quality of the King James text. Following the publication of scholarly revisions of several New Testament books, the Convocation of Canterbury approved the preparation of a revision of the King James text. This revision was to make as few alterations as possible to the text, based on the strongest manuscript evidence and approved by a two-thirds majority of the revision committee. The revised New Testament was published in 1881, and the Old Testament four years later. The considerable advances in the textual study of the New Testament resulted in a substantial number of changes, and the familiarity of the King James New Testament text made these changes all the more apparent. For example, the doxology at the end of the Lord’s Prayer was dropped from Matthew 6:13. Despite its undoubted greater accuracy, the Revised Version never achieved popularity.<sup>23</sup>

### **New Translations since the start of the Twentieth Century**

It did, however, set in train a process which highlighted deficiencies in the King James translation, and its status had been called into question within both the Church and the Academy. The American committee which had collaborated in the preparation of the Revised Version decided to pursue their own further revision, which was published as the American Standard Version in 1901. The momentum to offer alternatives to the King James version gathered pace with a number of scholarly translations in the following decades, which departed from the King James text as their base text, and offered new translations, rather than revisions. James Moffatt published his New Testament in 1913, and a whole Bible in 1926, while Edgar Goodspeed published his New Testament in 1923.<sup>24</sup> In his preface,<sup>25</sup> Moffatt noted the difficulty of departing from the linguistic contours of a well-established translation: “Any new translation starts under a special handicap. It appears to challenge in every line the rhythm and diction of an English classic, and this irritates many who have no knowledge of the original. *The old, they say,*

<sup>22</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version: The Ethel M. Wood Lecture delivered before the University of London on 20 March 1950*, London, Athlone Press, 1950, 21.

<sup>23</sup> On the Revised Version, see Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 683-700; Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 2, 218-255; Hammond, *Making of the English Bible*, 135-152.

<sup>24</sup> A companion translation of the Old Testament, edited by J. M. Powis Smith was published in 1927, and the whole Bible in one volume was published in 1931.

<sup>25</sup> The prefaces to an extensive number of English translations are conveniently collected together on the website <http://www.bible-researcher.com/versions.html>, from which the extracts from various prefaces and introductions below are derived, unless otherwise stated. While the editorial commentary on this website is somewhat one-sided, the large collection of source materials is useful.

*is better*. They are indifferent to the changes which recent grammatical research has necessitated ... But intelligibility is more than associations, and to atone in part for the loss of associations I have endeavoured to make the New Testament, especially St. Paul's epistles, as intelligible to a modern English reader as any version that is not a paraphrase can hope to make them." Accuracy and intelligibility, then, could be better served by an entirely new translation. Both Moffatt and Goodspeed were influenced by the down-to-earth language of the mass of non-literary papyri emanating from archaeological discoveries in Egypt, and this provided an additional impetus for them to abandon the lofty archaism of the King James text.

Moffatt and Goodspeed both went on to serve on the American revision committee continuing the work which had produced the American Standard Version, and which produced the Revised Standard Version New Testament in 1946.<sup>26</sup> This was followed by the Old Testament in 1952, and the Apocrypha in 1957. A Roman Catholic Edition was published in 1966, incorporating the protestant Apocrypha into the Old Testament canon. A second edition in 1971 incorporated a number of revisions and corrections, and in 1977, the Revised Standard Version Ecumenical Study Bible included 3 and 4 Maccabees and Psalm 151, thus completing the Orthodox Old Testament canon, and making this translation the first to be approved for use by all the major Christian traditions. The preface to the 1971 edition makes clear the awareness of its translators of the position of their work in the tradition of the King James version: "The Revised Standard Version of the Bible is an authorized revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901, which was a revision of the King James Version, published in 1611." They also recognise the foundational work of Tyndale: "It [the King James Version] kept felicitous phrases and apt expressions, from whatever source, which had stood the test of public usage. It owed most, especially in the New Testament, to Tyndale." And they place their own work firmly in this tradition: "[We] have sought to put the message of the Bible in simple, enduring words that are worthy to stand in the great Tyndale-King James tradition."

While the New Testament translation was initially well-received, more conservative churches took exception to the fact that the Old Testament was not translated in a way that indicated the fulfilment of prophecy in the New Testament. So, for example, Isaiah 7:14 was translated not as "a virgin shall give birth", but rather "a young woman." This dissatisfaction in turn prompted the preparation of the New American Standard Version in 1963 and 1971 by conservative American scholars as an alternative to the Revised Standard Version. As the family tree of descent from the Tyndale version had forked into different versions preferred by those of different theological convictions, so now the lineage of the King James version was producing multiple offspring appealing to a variety of theological perspectives.

Yet at the same time as these versions ultimately deriving from the King James Version were being prepared, further translations consciously independent of the King James tradition also continued to appear. Between 1947 and 1963, J.B. Phillips, an English clergyman and classicist published translations of the New Testament and four of the Old Testament prophets. Phillips expressed his admiration for the work of previous independent translators, including Moffatt and Goodspeed: "We cannot but admit that we are in a much more favourable position because such men had the courage to break a centuries- old tradition, and translate into contemporary English." In the preface to the

<sup>26</sup> On the Revised Standard Version, see Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 738-743; Bruce, *The English Bible*, 186-203.

Schools edition of his New Testament, he set forth how he had begun translating during the Second World War: "I wrote for the young people who belonged to my youth club, most of them not much above school-leaving age, and I undertook the work simply because I found that the Authorised Version was not intelligible to them. My primary aim was not in any sense to compete with the version of 1611, but to communicate to young people inspired truths of which they were almost entirely ignorant." He continued: "I would myself be among the first to admire and marvel at the beauty, the majesty and the moving rhythms of that version to which we of older generations are accustomed. But if the true meaning and relevance of the New Testament message is blunted and masked by archaic language, then I think we must, at least in our first approach, use language which is intelligible to modern children." For Phillips, the obstacles to intelligibility posed by the archaic language of the King James version represented a pastoral problem for the church, which he hoped to help to overcome with a fresh translation.<sup>27</sup>

But it was not only individuals who felt ever more keenly the shortcomings of the King James Version. Acting on an initiative of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1946, the major protestant denominations in Scotland and England created the Joint Committee on the New Translation of the Bible. The committee was expanded to include the Bible Societies, the churches of Wales and Ireland, and eventually the Roman Catholic church. The work of translation was given to a three panels of eminent scholars, under the directorship of Prof. C.H. Dodd, assisted by a fourth panel of literary advisers. For the first time, church authority chose to move away from the King James tradition: "The Joint Committee ... decided at the outset that what was now needed was not another revision of the Authorized Version but a genuinely new translation, in which an attempt should be made consistently to use the idiom of contemporary English to convey the meaning of the Greek." Thus the new translation could be freed from the shadows of the Hebrew and Greek idiom which had filtered into the older translations. The result, however, met with little approval. It seemed that the distinctive language of the old version had too firm a grip on the consciousness, and indeed, perhaps the subconsciousness of English readers and hearers to give way to a radically new translation, regardless of the quality of its scholarship.<sup>28</sup> In a scathing review in the *Sunday Telegraph*, T.S Eliot said: "So long as the New English Bible was used only for private reading, it would be merely a symptom of the decay of the English language in the middle of the twentieth century. But the more it is adopted for religious services the more it will become an active agent of decadence." And he concluded: "It would also be good if those who have authority to translate a dead language could show understanding and appreciation of their own."<sup>29</sup> The committee remained in place, and, chaired by Professor Morna Hooker, also produced the less controversial Revised English Bible in 1989.

Mention should also be made of the Jerusalem Bible, published in 1966, translated by Roman Catholic scholars from the Hebrew and Greek, not from the Vulgate, and containing a revision of the notes published in the French *La Bible de Jerusalem*, prepared by scholars of the Dominican School in Jerusalem, hence the name. It was less ambitious in terms of contemporary idiom than the New English Bible, and has become widely used, particularly in the Roman Catholic church, but by no means exclusively so.

<sup>27</sup> On modern translations in general, see Cecil Hargreaves, *A Translator's Freedom: Modern English Bibles and their Language*, Sheffield Academic Press, 1993, as well as the survey works by Daniell, Norton, Bruce and Hammond already referred to.

<sup>28</sup> A variety of perspectives on the New English Bible is represented in O. E. Nineham (ed.), *The New English Bible Reviewed*, London, 1965, while explanation of the processes involved in the translation is provided by Geoffrey Hunt, *About the New English Bible*, Cambridge University Press and Oxford University Press, 1970.

<sup>29</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, No. 98 (December 16, 1962), 7.

Also in 1966, the New Testament of Today's English Version, better known as the Good News Bible, was first published by the American Bible Societies, followed by a revision in 1971 and the Old Testament in 1976. Its circulation was boosted by a conscious marketing drive, with large numbers of cut-price copies sold in the first year of publication. It aimed to provide an idiomatic English translation at a level accessible to users of English as a second language:<sup>30</sup> "After ascertaining as accurately as possible the meaning of the original, the translators' next task was to express that meaning in a manner and form easily understood by the readers. Since this translation is intended for all who use English as a means of communication, the translators have tried to avoid words and forms not in current or widespread use; but no artificial limit has been set to the range of the vocabulary employed. Every effort has been made to use language that is natural, clear, simple, and unambiguous."<sup>31</sup> The Contemporary English Version, also published by the American Bible Societies, with the New Testament appearing in 1991 and both testaments published together in 1995, continues this tradition, aiming to use the English at the reading level of a fourth grade student in the United States.

The New International Version, published in 1973 and 1978, was translated by a committee from various American evangelical churches. This theological perspective is reflected in the translation, but has not prevented it from receiving a wide circulation in more mainstream protestant churches also.<sup>32</sup> Opposition to the use of gender-neutral language in a further edition published in London in 1996 resulted in subsequent editions appearing under the new title of Today's New International Version, while the original New International Version also continued to be published.

Even as new translations independent of the King James tradition, such as those mentioned, began to take an increasing share of the market, new versions deriving from the King James Bible also continued to appear. The New King James Version, published in 1982, maintained the "Received Text" of the King James version, while modernising aspects of the English usage. The New Revised Standard Version of 1990, as its name suggests, stands in the tradition of the King James, as transmitted through the Revised Standard Version. This revision took into account further discoveries of ancient manuscripts such as the Dead Sea Scrolls, and was charged "to continue in the tradition of the King James Bible, but to introduce such changes as are warranted on the basis of accuracy, clarity, euphony and current English usage." The use of inclusive language proved a point of controversy in this translation also. Briefly, one could also mention the 21st Century King James Version, also called the Third Millennium Bible, which replaces very archaic usages while essentially reproducing the King James text. The English Standard Version of 2001 represents an evangelical revision of the Revised Standard Version, edited by leading American evangelical J. I. Packer.

It is inescapable that some comment should be made on the revolution in communications media we have witnessed in recent decades. Multiple versions of the

<sup>30</sup> It has been pointed out that this may involve downplaying the literary level of parts of the original text in order to secure a uniform literary level in translation in the Good News Bible: for example, Bruce, *The English Bible*, 262, comments: "If we are looking for a translation dynamically equivalent to the original text of literature at the level of Isaiah 40, we shall find it in the Authorised Version rather than in the Good News Bible. In other words, where the goal of 'common English' is incompatible with the ideal of dynamic equivalence, the former has prevailed."

<sup>31</sup> Preface to the 1976 British Edition, viii.

<sup>32</sup> Calvin D. Linton, "The Importance of Literary Style in Bible Translation today," 19-43 in Kenneth Barker (ed.), *The Making of a Contemporary Translation: The purpose and method of the New International Version*, London, Hodder and Stoughton, 1987, discusses the literary relationship between the New International Version and the King James Version, 36-38.

Bible can now be accessed via the internet,<sup>33</sup> while copyrighted versions increasingly are available in multimedia formats such as CD-ROM, offering a range of translations and supplementary materials. And of course there are those transfers of the Bible to new media such as the *Twible*, a Twitter version by an American author which condenses Genesis 1 as follows: “Day 1: Lighting system installed. BRB [be right back]. Days 2-6: Some assembly required: sky, plants, cows, people. Left humans in charge, LOL [laugh out loud]. Day 7: Siesta”.<sup>34</sup> A different sort of engagement with new media is the *Brick Testament*, which portrays scenes from the Bible on the internet, constructed entirely out of Lego bricks.<sup>35</sup>

The New English Translation, or NET Bible, deserves particular mention as the most significant web-based Bible translation project to date, having been prepared with the specific object that it should be made freely available on the internet. A new translation was prepared by a team of over twenty-five scholars from both the United States and the United Kingdom, with drafts posted online to allow comments from experts and non-specialist Bible readers alike before the final text was decided upon. As an online translation, it can support a larger body of annotations than is generally feasible in print, with almost 61,000 translators’ notes appended to the text, many reflecting contemporary scholarly discussions in a way few print editions have room to, and thereby making the interpretative choices behind the translation readily accessible to any reader.

#### **Four Hundred Years On**

Four hundred years after its first publication, not only does the textual tradition deriving from the King James Version continue to flourish, but of course it should be noted that the Version itself continues to enjoy widespread use, particularly in more conservative circles in America.<sup>36</sup> But with the end of the dominance of one version in the course of the twentieth century, we have in a sense seen two schools of translation develop. One stresses the importance of a close and accurate rendering of the original Hebrew and Greek into English. The other, using an approach sometimes termed “dynamic equivalence,” stresses the importance of an intelligible and idiomatic translation. Through the twentieth century we have also seen the arrival of close-to-universal literacy in parts of the English-speaking world, as well as the widespread use of English as a second language. With this, the linguistic usage of a small “educated class” can no longer be regarded as normative. We have seen advances in psychology and education that mean that children are no longer perceived as adults in miniature. Such developments and more have fed into the need for a variety of translations of the Bible, and the success of certain translations in certain quarters.

Four hundred years on, the contribution of the King James version to the language, culture and faith of the English-speaking world has been beyond measure. Never again will one version of the Bible have a comparable impact.

<sup>33</sup> See, for example, <http://www.biblegateway.com/>, which offers access to twenty-five English translations, as well as Greek and Hebrew versions and translations in other modern languages.

<sup>34</sup> The *Twible* is the work of American author Jana Riess; see <http://twitter.com/#/janariess>. A less tongue-in-cheek twitter version is *Biblesummary*, by English evangelist Chris Juby; see <http://twitter.com/#/biblesummary>, providing a daily tweet of a more conventional summary of a chapter of the Bible.

<sup>35</sup> *The Brick Testament* consists of over 4,500 individual illustrations, and is the work of American Brendan Powell Smith; see <http://www.thebricktestament.com/>

<sup>36</sup> Norton, *Bible as Literature*, vol. 2, 176, coins the term “AVolatry” for the exclusive adherence in certain circles to the King James version as the only acceptable English translation.