

## THE AUTHORISED VERSION: Why the Authorised Version

The Rev. G. Burrows

12 November 2011, Suffolk

### Why the Authorised Version?

What I have been asked to try and do this afternoon as part of our ongoing commemoration of the four hundredth anniversary of the translation of the Authorised Version 1611 is to explain why it is still the most sound and accurate version for today and why we advocate its use in preference to other versions available today. Because time is comparatively short we restrict ourselves to a comparison of the Authorised Version with the New International Version, the English Standard Version, and the New King James Version.

Secondly, Mr. Allan McGregor was originally scheduled to give this lecture, since he has produced an excellent survey of this very issue in his book *Three Modern Versions A Critical Assessment of the NIV., ESV, NKJV*, and I am drawing on his material in this lecture.

### First of all, let me make some preliminary observations.

The case that we are making for the Authorised Version is not to say that it is in every minute detail of translation perfect. What I mean is that certain words and phrases could have been translated differently. For example the Authorised Version uses the word 'bishop' whereas non-Episcopalians might have preferred the word elder or minister. There are words and phrases which in the process of exposition we might clarify by the substitution of other similar words. We may admit that certain words in the text could have been translated more precisely or even more accurately. But what we do strongly contend for is that the Authorised Version is based on the most accurate original text and is the most accurate translation available today.

In answer to any who would argue that its language is too difficult for the modern reader we might quote the words of Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones:

We are told that the Bible must be put in such simple terms of language that anybody taking it up and reading it is going to understand it right away. My friends, this is sheer nonsense. What we must do is educate the masses of the people up to the Bible not bring the Bible down to their level. One of the greatest troubles today is that everything is being brought down to the same level; everything is cheapened. The common man is made the standard of authority; he decides everything, and everything has to be brought down to him...[what] we need to do is not to replace it...we need to reach and train people up to the standard and the language, the dignity and glory of the old Authorised Version.<sup>1</sup>

When Tyndale sought to put the Bible into the language of the man who guided the plough, he took it for granted that understanding would still require effort.

Though as far as I know Prince Charles has never claimed to be a follower of Christ, he did make a pertinent comment in regard to the language of the Book of Common Prayer whilst championing the language of Cranmer's Prayer Book over the banalities of the Alternative Service Book. He said 'The Word of God is supposed to be a bit over our heads. Elevated is what God is'.

What is also fascinating in regard to the comprehensibility of the Authorised Version is that in many parts of the world, certainly in the southern Bible belt of the USA, the AV is held in the highest esteem as it is also by large numbers in Africa and the Far East who appeared to have no difficulty in understanding it.

We might add that this that no one would necessarily want to claim that those Christians who use the Authorised Version are always better informed, or more earnest about their faith than those who use other versions. This clearly is not always the case; one would not be wanting to disfellowship those who use other versions. The point of this lecture is simply to show that the Authorised Version is a more accurate and superior version to the others.

**The key issue in the question of which is the most trustworthy and accurate version of the Bible is the matter of the Biblical language texts.**

It would seem that there are still many Christians (present company excepted) who take the view that modern versions of the Bible are merely attempts to update the language of the Authorised Version. What such friends have never been told is that the majority of modern versions, undoubtedly to a greater or lesser degree the three which we are looking at in this lecture, have been derived from entirely different biblical texts to those used in the translation of the Authorised Version.

The text of the Authorised Version is based on what is generally called the Textus Receptus or the Received Text. The Textus Receptus is derived from the majority of texts available, which represent 90 to 95% of all existing Greek manuscripts. These manuscripts are referred to as the Byzantine Text and also known by some as the Traditional Text, the majority text or the Antiochian Text.<sup>2</sup>

The Textus Receptus agrees with the earliest versions of the Bible: Peshita (AD150), Old Latin Vulgate (AD157), the Italic Bible (AD157), the Waldensian (AD120 and onwards), the Gallic Bible in southern France (AD177), the Gothic Bible (AD330-350). These versions clearly predate the minority texts such as Vaticanus and Sinaiticus.

Amongst other widely used texts which are based on the Received Text we could include the Old Syriac Bible (AD400, the Arminian Bible (AD400—there are 1,244 copies of this version still in existence), the Palistine Syriac (AD450), the French Bible of Oliveton (AD1535), the Czech Bible (AD1602), the Italian Bible of Diodati (AD1606), the Greek Orthodox Bible (used from apostolic times to the present day by the Greek Orthodox Church).

What we need to be very clear about is that the text found in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts was the text used by Erasmus in the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament in 1516.

In all essentials the New Testament text first printed by Erasmus and later by Stephanus (1550) and Elzevir (1633) is in full agreement with the Traditional Text/Textus Receptus, providentially preserved in the vast majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts.

This printed text commonly called the Textus Receptus was used by the Protestant Reformers during the Reformation and by all Protestants everywhere for three hundred years thereafter. It was from this Textus Receptus that the Authorised Version of the Bible and other classic Protestant translations were made.

The Byzantine Text and the Textus Receptus or Traditional Text are all essentially the same thing.<sup>3</sup> The Textus Receptus was compiled from this Byzantine or majority text by such textual editors as Erasmus, Stephens, Beza and the Elzevirs in the 16th and 17th centuries. These editions differ slightly from one another but are the same basic text.<sup>4</sup>

The term majority text needs to be used with some care at the present time because two Greek texts, one by Hodges and Farstad in 1982 and another by Robinson and Pierpont, claim to represent the majority of manuscripts. The Hodges and Farstad text underlies the New King James Version as we shall see later in this lecture. It is therefore necessary now to refer to the traditional majority text and the Hodges Farstad Majority Text, the latter which differs from the Textus Receptus in about 1,900 places. For example, 1 John 5.7 is omitted from the Hodges/Farstad Majority Text.

At this present time there are between 5,000 and 6,000 known Greek manuscripts of the New Testament or parts of the New Testament.

The extant texts of secular writings of antiquity such as Herodotus, Thucydides, and Sophocles are but few in comparison with the thousands of manuscripts of the Scriptures, and are separated from the originals by five hundred additional years. These exist without the extraordinary safeguards whereby the integrity of the Scriptures has been protected.<sup>5</sup>

These 5,000-6,000 manuscripts can be classified as follows:

- 90 papyrus fragments dated between the 2nd century and the 8th century.
- 299 uncial script (manuscripts written in capital letters); copies are dated between the 3rd and 10th centuries.
- 2,812 miniscule script (manuscripts written in smaller script); copies are dated between the 9th and the 16th centuries.
- There are also about 2,281 Lectionary copies. These Lectionaries are lessons selected for public reading in the services of the Eastern Church and were all compiled exactly the same from at least the 4th century until the invention of printing in the 16th century. The texts of the passages selected are identical with the Traditional Text.<sup>6</sup> As is pointed out in the TBS publication *The Divine Original*,

The overwhelming majority of these manuscripts agree so closely that they may be said to present the same Greek text called by some the Byzantine Text because it prevailed throughout the Church in the Byzantine period, AD 312-1453 and indeed long after.<sup>7</sup>

Even with new discoveries of texts the figure still remains at 90-95% supporting the Textus Receptus.

What needs to be emphasized is that for an ancient book the available materials are massive and more than adequate for our needs.

We emphasize again what is well known amongst students of the text (in the best sense of the word, textual critics) that the large majority of this massive collection of manuscripts available support very closely the text which underlies the Authorised Version.

Zane Hodges comments:

This piece of information however may come as a surprise to many ordinary Christians who have gained the impression that the Authorized Version is supported chiefly by inferior manuscripts but have never realized that which contemporary critics call inferior manuscripts actually make up a huge majority of all manuscripts.<sup>8</sup>

Earlier in his life Dr. Hodges did equate the traditional 'Majority Text' with the Textus Receptus and he made this pertinent observation:

The manuscript tradition of an ancient book will, under any but the most exceptional conditions, multiply in a reasonably regular fashion with the result that the copies nearest the autograph will normally have the largest number of descendents. The further removed in the history of transmission a text becomes from its source the less time it has to leave behind a large family of offspring. Hence, in a large tradition where a pronounced unity is observed between, let us say, eighty percent of the evidence, a very strong presumption is raised that this numerical preponderance is due to direct derivation from the very oldest sources. In the absence of any convincing contrary explanation, this presumption is raised to a very high level of probability indeed. The Majority Text (Received Text) upon which the King James Bible is based, has in reality the strongest claim possible to be regarded as an authentic representation of the original text.<sup>9</sup>

**The question then arises, why do modern scholars and translators appear to reject this vast body of evidence?**

We can suggest the following reasons.

**They have abandoned the belief in the Biblical principle of the Divine preservation of Scripture.**

There is clear scriptural evidence of a laying up and preservation of the Scriptures as they were revealed to God's people during the period of the Old Testament.<sup>10</sup>

The Bible is God's Word written. 'Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost' (2 Peter 1.2). The first record we have of this inspired writing is found in Exodus 17.14 where we find that soon after the war with the Amalakitites, the Lord says to Moses 'Write this for a memorial in a book'. A similar reference is found in Exodus 24.4 'Moses wrote all the words of the LORD'. And again in Exodus 34.27, the Lord said to him, 'write thou these words...'. There are other passages which showed Moses wrote the whole of the Pentateuch, that is the first five books of the Bible (see Deuteronomy 31.9, 24-26: Numbers 33.1,2).

These sacred writings were the inspired originals—the autographs as they get a to be called—and were carefully preserved near to the Ark of the Covenant. We read in Deuteronomy 31.25, 26 that 'Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenants of the LORD, saying, take this book of the law and put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God that it may be there for a witness against thee (cf. Joshua 1.8; 1 Kings 2.3, Nehemiah 8.1).

We further read that the writings of Joshua were in the same way preserved alongside the Ark (Joshua 24.26), and also the writings of Samuel were laid up before the Lord beside the ark. (1 Samuel 10.25).

We might also note that the placing of the Scriptures near to the ark in the heart of the tabernacle meant that they were separated from all other books. These books were manifestly declared to be holy.

Also we make note that these scrolls were placed under the wings of the cherubim (Exodus 25.18-20), an indication of their being divinely safeguarded and preserved.

The Westminster Divines recognised that there was a providence of God being exercised in the preservation of the purity of the written Word of God.

The Old Testament in Hebrew (which was the native language of the people of God of old), and the New Testament in Greek (which, at the time of the writing of it, was most generally known to the nations), being immediately inspired by God, and by His singular care and Providence, kept pure in all ages, are therefore authentic; so as, in all controversies of religion, the Church is finally to appeal unto them'.<sup>11</sup>

Doubtless they called to mind that when Jehoiakim, king of Judah, cut the leaves out of the book of the prophecies that Jeremiah had dictated to Baruch the scribe, and cast them into the fire that was in the hearth, so they were burned, the Lord 'in His singular care and Providence' ordered the prophet to commit the Divine messages a second time to writing (Jeremiah 36).<sup>12</sup>

Again, when the forces of the Assyrian king Antiochus Epiphanes (d. 164) had overrun the Holy Land, and were bent on destroying the Jewish religion, the very existence of the Old Testament was at stake. Not only was the Temple desecrated, the Levitical sacrifices proscribed, the performance of the rite of circumcision forbidden, but the possession of any of the Holy Scriptures was punished with death. Yet God 'in his singular care and Providence' raised up Judas Maccabaeus and endued him and his patriotic followers with such courage that again and again they inflicted decisive defeats upon the oppressors, drove them out of Jerusalem and cleansed the Temple. This from a human perspective saved the Holy Oracles from perishing from the face of the earth.<sup>13</sup>

In regard to the New Testament, until about one hundred years ago most evangelical Protestants had the same convictions with respect to the Greek New Testament. They felt that in the Textus Receptus they had substantially the reproductions of the autographs of the New Testament writers. They saw the hand of God in the warnings uttered by the early Church Fathers when heretics began deliberately to corrupt the New Testament texts. It enabled the scribes, when the persecutions ceased, to weed out these corruptions. They gave attention also to every place where there were variant readings and uncertainties, so much so that before the close of the 4th century the text had become uniform in the type known as the Byzantine.

These Protestants considered that the Reformation was the greatest blessing the Lord sent to the visible church since Pentecost, and that it largely centred around the work of Erasmus, Ximenez, Stephens and Beza, whose labours led to the printing of the text common to the great majority of the Greek New Testament manuscripts. In all this they could see nothing less than the singular care and Providence of God giving them substantially the text of the of the autographs.

### **The Textual Critics**

During the 17th century further ancient Greek texts of the New Testament began to come to light. Various scholars began to compare these manuscripts with those of the Textus Receptus. Among these men was Brian Walton (1600-1661), Bishop of Chester, who compared the Greek text of Stephens (1550) with the evidence from the recently acquired Codex Alexandrinus which had arrived in London in 1627 and of the manuscript which had been collated by the well known Archbishop James Ussher, together with the Syriac, Latin, Ethiopian and Persian versions. (This

manuscript was originally intended as a gift to James I but he died before he was able to receive it, and it was therefore presented to his successor Charles I.)

Other scholars such as John Fell (1625-1686), Dr. John Mill (1645-1707), and Richard Bentley of Cambridge (1662-742), were involved in similar research. Although these scholars noted variant readings, this in no wise undermined their confidence in the general accuracy of the Textus Receptus.

However in the 18th century, under the strong influence of religious rationalism, the belief began to develop that these recently discovered manuscripts, being of more ancient date, must because of their antiquity be more akin to the originals.

Somewhat surprisingly, a devout evangelical (according to some) German Lutheran, scholar, and Bible commentator, J. A. Bengel (1687-1752; apart from this issue he is often referred to as the most excellent Bengel), stated that he preferred the more ancient authorities, and on the strength of such convictions altered the Textus Receptus. It must be added however that his knowledge of the text of the oldest manuscripts was very limited; the publication of these texts for the use of scholars did not appear until fifty to one hundred years after his death.

S. M. Horton comments:

He, and those carried away by this adage, never seem to have paused and reflected, that a document can be written in a very great hurry and under very difficult or dangerous circumstances, as in times of persecution, and consequently be marked by great carelessness and many mistakes. In other words an ancient manuscript is not necessarily an accurate copy of an exemplar: it can be the very reverse.<sup>14</sup>

J. J. Wettstein, of Basle, who had been an assistant of Richard Bentley of Cambridge, and was experienced in such matters, lost no time in pointing out that the manuscripts on which Bengel had placed such great reliance and used to 'correct' and 'improve' the Textus Receptus were characterised by many careless mistakes and omissions and hence could only be regarded as untrustworthy.

The two principal ancient manuscripts deviating from the Textus Receptus are the Codex Vaticanus, first listed in the Vatican Library in 1418; its history prior to that date was unknown. The Roman Catholic scholar J. L. Hug (1765-1846) examined it in his day and from that time it has generally been accepted as having been written about AD 340. This manuscript was passed over by Cardinal Ximenez and Erasmus as not carrying enough weight or reliability to warrant any change in the Textus Receptus.

When in the 19th century Dr. F. H. A. Scrivener examined this manuscript he described it by saying, 'One small feature of this copy, is the great number of its omissions, which has induced Dr. Dobbin to describe it as presenting "an abbreviated text of the New Testament". Many of the omissions seem to be oversights of the copyists and there are also occasions when the scribe has written words and clauses twice over'.<sup>15</sup>

The second manuscript of this type is the Codex Sinaiticus which it is estimated was written about ten years after the Codex Vaticanus. It was found by Dr. L. F. C. Tischendorf (1815-74) in the monastery of St. Catherine near to what is called Mount Sinai in 1844.

By 1871 Dean Burgon had thoroughly studied copies of each of these two manuscripts. He wrote:

Ought it not sensibly to detract from our opinion of the value of their evidence to discover that it is easier to find two consecutive verses in which the two manuscripts differ, the one from the other, than two consecutive verses in which they entirely agree?... On every such occasion only one of them can possibly be speaking the truth. Shall I be thought unreasonable if I confess that these perpetual textual inconsistencies between Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus—grave inconsistencies, and occasionally even gross ones—altogether destroy my confidence in either?<sup>16</sup>

The argument that the oldest copies are therefore the best overlooks and fails to take into consideration that there are many inconsistencies between Vaticanus and Sinaiticus and also that they represent the extreme minority of texts. These points were made by those originally gathered to form the revision committee in the 1870s; some immediately withdrew and others used rare attendance as an expression of their disillusionment with the proposed method of procedure.

### **The Westcott and Hort Theory**

A brief summary of this theory would include the following points:

1. The Bible is to be treated as any other book; this includes a denial of divine preservation.
2. There are essentially two main text groups or types.
  - a. The so-called Neutral text or Alexandrian text represented by Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus.
  - b. The Antiochan or Byzantine text.
3. The Vaticanus and Sinaitic texts are the oldest texts extant and therefore the most reliable.

The Syrian Recension Theory was proposed in the 19th century. According to this, the early church leaders privately convened and devised a plan whereby they agreed upon explicit alterations and additions to the accepted texts—texts that most considered to be sacred, of divine origin—and made new manuscripts containing their edits. These allegedly became the basis for the Byzantine manuscripts. The conjecture was that these early church leaders did this for no apparent reason other than to correct writings considered to match what they wanted; however, they left absolutely no record of it.

This of course is a completely unacceptable speculation that warrants no acceptance whatsoever. The early church would not have convened privately, and they certainly wouldn't change the text of writings they considered sacred and which contained the substance and foundation of truths for which they were willingly martyred. The sense of the early church would not have been in universal agreement on this activity if someone had suggested it, and if anyone had actually ever attempted such a thing there would have been a violent uproar among the saints—it would have caused a universal crisis in the church. The Syrian Recension, had it occurred, would certainly not have gone unnoticed and unmentioned in the historical record. The complete absence from the whole of the historical record of the church is reasonable proof that the Syrian Recension did not occur.

## Methods of Translation

In this section we try to examine the methods and principles used in the translation of Scripture from the original languages into another language, in our case English.

Two main types of translation are used today. First is the method called formal equivalence, as used in the translation of the Authorised Version. It seeks as far as possible to give a direct word for word translation of the original text.

The second method is that known as dynamic equivalence. This seeks to give the reader the essential essence of the original text in the structure and idiom of contemporary speech.

A third method is paraphrase, in which the essential thoughts of the original are transferred pretty much free style, taking into account the story but not the form or structure of the original.

An example of this is given by Alan J MacGregor in comparing the Authorised Version Proverbs 5.15, 16. The AV reads,

Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well. Let thy fountains be dispersed abroad, and rivers of waters in the streets.

The New International Version (1984), a dynamic equivalence translation, has:

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares?

This according to the present principle of paraphrase is rendered in the Good News Bible as,

Be faithful to your own wife and give your love to her alone. Children that you have by other women will do you no good.

This last translation can only be described as a total paraphrase. It is the exact opposite to the principle of formal or word for word equivalence.

## Italics

In the Authorised Version the linguistic styles of the Hebrew and in particular the Greek are often very hard to translate literally—that is, to express the truth and still make good English. To overcome this difficulty, the AV translators helpfully add English words, which they place in italics to make sense of what is clearly implied in the original languages. An example of this is found in Psalm 22.1.

My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me? *why art thou* so far from helping me, *and from* the words of my roaring?

Without the words added in italics it would be more difficult to understand the full sense of the verse. At the same time however we are able to see the words that have been added.

## Three recent versions

We must now go on to give brief overviews of the three more recent versions as mentioned in Mr MacGregor's title, the New International Version, the English Standard Version and the New King James Version.

## The New International Version

In the early 1960s a group of evangelicals became dissatisfied with the existing translation and formed a committee in 1965 to plan a new translation of Scripture. The project was funded by the New York Bible Society, and Edwin H. Palmer was selected as executive secretary. A committee consisting of one hundred and four scholars from the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Ireland, Australia and New Zealand representing thirty-four denominations came together. Amongst them were such reformed scholars as William Hendrickson and John J. Davis, but there were also others of a much less reformed persuasion.

The format of the NIV followed the Revised Version and the Revised Standard Version, in using paragraphs as opposed to the individual verse by verse formats of the Authorised Version.

The complete version of the NIV appeared in 1978; the publisher stated that their aim was to 'do for our time what the King James Version did for its day'. In the preface, the translators state that the first concern of the translation is the accuracy and fidelity to the thought of the biblical writers.<sup>17</sup> It needs to be noted that the NIV is based on the United Bible Societies' Greek Text, which is essentially a Westcott and Hort type text. Malcolm Watts comments:

This Westcott/Hort Text was the forerunner of what is known today as the Nestlé/Aland or United Bible Societies Text... The New International Version, for example, while claiming in its preface to follow an 'eclectic' Greek text (in selecting here referring to one compiled from a variety of manuscripts), proceeds at once to inform the reader that 'where existing manuscripts differ, the translators made their choice of the readings according to the accepted principles of New Testament textual criticism'. Adoption of fundamentally flawed 'principles' has meant that the resulting text is very similar to the one produced in 1881 by Westcott and Hort'.<sup>18</sup>

The NIV translators also state that they have endeavoured to steer a middle course between the principles of dynamic equivalence and the principle of formal equivalence.<sup>19</sup>

Those who favour the use of dynamic equivalence claim that it allows today's generation to read the Word of God in a language they can easily understand. They say that it is no good having an accurate 'word for word' translation if it is unintelligible to all but the well read. William Tyndale is often quoted to support this. We must remember, however, that Tyndale's desire for every English ploughboy to read and study the Word of God for himself did not mean that he expected them necessarily to understand every word immediately. In using the 'formal' equivalence method of translation, retaining the structure and the technical words and phrases of the original, he recognized that understanding of truths of the Word as given by God the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2.14, 15) required effort. Tyndale did not see it as the province of the translator to be the interpreter as well. He did not impose his opinion on the text by paraphrasing Scripture, giving what he thought would be the easier-to-grasp interpretation. Instead, he translated the Scriptures as accurately as he could and left it to the Spirit of God to teach the readers.

Indeed in 2 Peter 3.15, 16 the Apostle writes,

even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; as also in all *his* epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as *they do* also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Here Peter tells us that there are some things in the Word of God which are for God's own purposes hard to be understood. If God inspires the writers of His Word to use difficult, technical, sometimes rare words, it must surely be the responsibility of the translators to respect this and not to presume to change these expressions in favour of something easier to read and understand. The great danger of dynamic equivalence is that the translator often expresses his own mind rather than the mind of God.

Dynamic equivalence makes readability the main criterion: something like a newspaper. But this readability causes many to read the Bible as they would a newspaper. Some people actually say they could read the modern versions like a novel. The trouble is when people read a novel they do not really take in details: they are looking for the overall theme or the plot. This does not encourage serious study of the Scriptures. Nor does it encourage a prayerful dependence upon God as we approach Scripture.

Come, divine Interpreter,  
bring me eyes Thy book to read.<sup>20</sup>

### **Gender neutral versions of the NIV**

We might also in this very brief overview state that in 1995 the publishers Hodder & Stoughton published, on behalf of the International Bible Society, a new edition of the NIV called the New International Version Inclusive Language Edition. The publisher stated, 'It was recognized that it was often appropriate to meet patriarchalism of the culture of the biblical writers through gender inclusive language when this could be done without compromising the message of the Spirit'.<sup>21</sup>

G. W. and D. E. Anderson of the Trinitarian Bible Society make the following observation,

The initial question to be asked is how can one remain faithful to the original language texts and at the same time abandon them? The cultures in which the Bible was originally written were strongly patriarchal. Families were headed by fathers, and except in unusual situations the inheritance was passed from father to son. In addition, fathers were often responsible for the actions of their children, and husbands for their wives (see Numbers 30). It is males who were to be circumcised, the males who were to go to war and the males who were to present themselves before the Lord three times each year (Exodus 23:17). Thus it is impossible to see how one can 'mute the patriarchalism of the culture' without 'compromising the message of the Spirit'.<sup>22</sup>

### **The matter of commercial interests**

There has always been a commercial aspect to the printing of Bibles. The AV is subject to what is known as Royal Letters Patent. The Queen's printers, Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press, hold these. The purpose of the Royal Letters Patent is to protect the text of the AV. The NIV and all of the modern translations are subject to modern copyright law, which has more stringent restrictions. But this enabled publishers to make lucrative profits. The NIV is printed by Zondervan in the USA and by Hodder & Stoughton in the UK. No doubt some sincere Christians may work for these companies, but these companies are or were part of Rupert Murdoch's media and publishing empire, the same empire that has been in the news of late; they owned *The News of the World*, and still own *the Sun* newspapers. One must seriously ask the question whether, in such an organisation, profits take precedence over disinterested motives concerning the accuracy of Scripture.

## **The English Standard Version**

The English Standard Version is claimed to be a conservative revision of the Revised Standard Version of 1952. The position of the Trinitarian Bible Society on the ESV is that this is a light revision of the RSV and that, because of the textual basis and translational errors carried over from the RSV, it is not a trustworthy translation of the Bible.

Michael Marlowe gives insight into the origins of the ESV:

This is an evangelical revision of the Revised Standard Version that corrects the non-Christian interpretations of the RSV in the Old Testament and improves the accuracy throughout with more literal renderings. It also updates the language somewhat. The makers of this version undertook the work with the idea that there was a need for an evangelical version that was more literal than the New International Version but more idiomatic than the New American Standard Bible.

The version has its origins in discussions that took place in 1997 in a group called together by James Dobson of Focus in the Family over concerns arising out of the NIV's re-gendered language versions. In the course of the discussion it became clear that concerns with the NIV extended beyond gender issues. Some months later, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School professor Wayne Grudem and Crossway President Lane Dennis entered into negotiations with the National Council of Churches to use the 1971 revision of the Revised Standard Version as the basis for a new translation.<sup>23</sup>

The ESV has been acclaimed by many evangelicals and has been thought of as the formal equivalence answer to the NIV. Dr. J. I. Packer has gone so far as to say that he believes that the ESV has established itself as, in effect, the new King James Version for the 21st century.

## **The gender issue**

One of the noticeable features of the ESV is the numerous changes in gender. Since 1986, most translators have made it a point to remove 'male orientated' language from modern translations. Though at the outset those who had a concern for truth in the English Standard Version had a concern about the gender issues in the NIV, nevertheless the version does include gender word changes.

For examples see page 12 the English Standard Version pamphlet published by Trinitarian Bible Society.<sup>24</sup>

### **Matthew 6.1**

RSV: Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them

ESV: Beware of practicing your piety before other people in order to be seen by them

### **Matthew 10.41**

RSV: He who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward.

ESV: The one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward.

### **Matthew 18.7**

RSV: But woe to the man by whom the temptation comes!

ESV: But woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!

Matthew 19.11

RSV: But he said to them, 'Not all men can receive this saying'

ESV: But he said to them, 'Not everyone can receive this saying'

The preface to the ESV refers to the legacy of translation, stating that the words and phrases of the ESV grow out of the Tyndale/King James legacy. This is written to give a sort of solidarity to the line of succeeding translations. The ESV attempts to fit easily into the kind of translations which have the same characteristics as the Tyndale New Testament and the AV. But does it succeed? When given a cursory consideration, it appears to; it appears that the statements made about it are true. But does this bear up under closer examination?<sup>25</sup> Consider the following facts.

1. Does the ESV New Testament textual basis follow this 'legacy'? No, it does not. The textual basis of the AV was the Textus Receptus New Testament while the textual basis of the ESV was the modern United Bible Societies 4th edition/Nestle-Aland 27th edition Greek text using modern principles of textual criticism.

2. Does the ESV Old Testament textual basis follow this legacy? Once again, no, it does not. The AV used the Bomberg text with a few references to the Latin Vulgate and several other translations of the Old Testament; the ESV's use of the Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia, which is almost identical to Bomberg (less than twelve differences which make a difference in the English text) can indeed be considered a part of the legacy. But the ESV preface states that 'in exceptional, difficult cases, the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Septuagint, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the Syriac Peshitta, the Latin Vulgate, and other sources were consulted to shed possible light on the text, or, if necessary, to support a divergence from the Masoretic text'.<sup>26</sup> This use of other sources goes beyond the legacy and removes the ESV from the lineage it boasts.

### **The New King James Version**

By now I trust that we have seen something of the shortcomings of the Westcott and Hort text and Bible translations like the NIV and the more recent ESV which use texts based on the Hort/Westcott text-type.

For those desiring a contemporary language Bible which is at the same time based on the Received Text, the NKJV seems to be the perfect answer. Its preface seems to reassure us:

in the preface to the 1611 edition, the translators of the Authorised Version, known popularly as the King James Bible state that it was not their purpose to make a new translation...but to make a good one better. Indebted to the earlier work of William Tyndale and others, they saw their best contribution to consist in revising and enhancing the excellence of the English versions that had sprung from the Reformation of the 16th century. In harmony with the purpose of King James scholars, the translators of the present work are not pursuing the goal of innovation. They have perceived the Holy Bible, New King James Version, as a continuation of the labours of the earlier translators, thus unlocking for today's readers the spiritual treasures found especially in the Authorised Version of the Holy Scriptures.<sup>27</sup>

Later on in the preface they state: 'The New King James New Testament has been based on the Received Text, thus perpetuating the tradition begun by William Tyndale in 1525 and continued by the 1611 translators in rendering the Authorised Version'.<sup>28</sup>

However, as Allan McGregor points out, though the NKJV translators claim that the New Testament is based upon the Received Text, this is not entirely true. In a number of places it agrees with the Westcott and Hort text. It also misses out words found in the Greek, and in some places adds words without the use of italics. In saying this I am not suggesting that the faults are always as serious as in other modern versions and neither are they as numerous, but they do nevertheless form over one thousand two hundred departures from the Received Text by alteration, addition or omission of words.

In the New King James Version Study Edition, there is a section entitled 'The History of the King James Bible'. On page 1235 of this edition, we find the following:

It was the editors' conviction that the use of footnotes would encourage further inquiry by readers. They also recognize that it was easier for the average reader to delete something he or she felt was not properly in the text, and to insert the word or phrase which had been left out by the Revisers.<sup>29</sup>

These footnotes indicate where the Westcott and Hort Text differs from the Received Text. Right away we see that there is not the commitment to the Received Text in the NKJV as we first were led to believe. This above statement by the editor undermines the integrity of the Received Text.

The reluctance of some NKJV translators to wholly embrace the Received Text is a cause for concern.

#### **Words and meanings changed**

The NKJV follows the lead of the NIV in removing every Old Testament reference to the word 'sodomite' (e.g., Deuteronomy 23.17, 1 Kings 14.24, 15.12, and 2 Kings 23.7). The Hebrew word is *quadhesh* or *kadesh*, meaning 'a sacred person: a devotee to licentious idolatry, a cultic (male) prostitute or priest of Astarte...applied to the abominable practices of male homosexuals dedicating themselves to the honour of a false God'.<sup>30</sup> The NKJV renders this 'perverted one' which does not fully explain the Hebrew word.

Interestingly, Jerome criticises the Septuagint for softening the translation of this same word.

#### **Omissions of words and phrases**

It must be noted that all translations occasionally omit words which are found in the Hebrew and Greek texts. However, one would think that a revision of the AV would not omit words which are found in the Hebrew and Greek and are found in the AV.<sup>31</sup>

#### **Historic Present Tense abandoned by NKJV**

The NKJV makes a significant change to one of the important aspects of the AV. The AV correctly translates the historic present tense. When in an historical narrative in Scripture a writer sought to give his readers a vivid description of a certain event, he would use a present tense verb to express it. This way of writing would give the reader a sense of being there as an observer. The verbal form is often used in the Gospels, for example John 1.29.<sup>32</sup>

AV: The next day John **seeth** Jesus coming unto him, and **saith**, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

The NKJV translates the boldfaced verbs, not in the modern sense as 'sees' and 'says', but in the past tense as 'saw' and 'said' with no indication of the change.

This policy was used in the translation of the Revised Version and the American Standard Version of 1901 and also the New American Standard Version of more recent date. However this last version, while using the English past tenses to make the reading conform to modern usage, at the same time marked each instance with an asterisk.

Thus there is a tradition in the translation of the English Bible to make a distinction of this verb tense. Since this is one of the strengths of the AV, one would have expected that the translators of the NKJV would have continued the practice.

### **Summary of facts concerning the NKJV**

1. It makes 100,000 changes to the AV, which in the New Testament also involves over 1,200 departures from the Greek Received Text.
2. It sides on many occasions with the NIV rendering rather than with the AV, whose merits it claims to build upon.
3. It rejects many words and phrases which are in the AV, and more seriously in the Hebrew and the Greek texts.

### **Conclusion**

The intrinsic worth of the Authorised Version is seen in many things.

1. In the high doctrine of inspiration which its translators held and which led them to adhere closely to the original text.
2. In the fact that it is based upon the Received Text.
3. In the respect the translators had for the text of Scripture as the very words of God Himself.
4. In the completeness and fullness of the text they used, in comparison with modern versions which appear truncated and mutilated.
5. In its orthodoxy, that is, in its adherence to the great, fundamental teachings and truths of the Christian faith.

The abiding worth of the Authorised Version is evident, firstly, in its simplicity and clarity. It is couched in good Anglo-Saxon English, which has an enduring quality and resonance. Secondly, it is evidenced by the manner in which the translators approached their task, that is, by the faithfulness with which they translated what they understood to be the very words of God. In this way they were careful not to impose an interpretation upon the text, in contrast to modern translations which have bowed to human autonomy and have fashioned the text of Scripture according to their own ideological and philosophical presuppositions.

In the Authorised Version, the sovereignty of God's Word is evident, which gives to it an intrinsic and abiding worth. 'The word of the Lord endureth for ever' (1 Peter 1.25).

---

Endnotes:

1. Part of an address given by Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones at the National Bible Rally in the Royal Albert Hall, London, on October 24th, 1961; quoted on [www.jeffriddle.net/2011/02/d-martyn-lloyd-jones-authorized-version.html](http://www.jeffriddle.net/2011/02/d-martyn-lloyd-jones-authorized-version.html).
2. Malcolm Watts, *The Lord Gave the Word* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1998), p. 20.
3. See D. O. Fuller, *Which Bible?* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1997), p. 6.
4. See *The Divine Original* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 1999), p. 4, for more information.
5. D. O. Fuller, *True or False?* [Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1997), p. 84.
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 179, 262.
7. *Divine Original*, p. 5.
8. Zane Hodges, 'The Greek Text of the King James Version', *BibSac*, BSAC 125:500 (Oct 1968), [learntheology.com/the-greek-text-of-the-king-james-version.html](http://learntheology.com/the-greek-text-of-the-king-james-version.html).
9. *Ibid.*
10. See Watts, pp. 4-5.
11. Westminster Confession of Faith, I.8; see also Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Truth Unchanged, Unchanging*.
12. See Lloyd-Jones, *Truth*.
13. For the complete summary of the preservation of the Hebrew text see Lloyd-Jones, *Truth*, p. 489.
14. S. M. Horton quoted in Lloyd-Jones, p. 491.
15. F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), p. 120.
16. Lloyd-Jones, p. 492.
17. *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 1983), p. xi.
18. Watts, p. 26.
19. *NIV*, pp. xi-xii.
20. Charles Wesley, 'Come, Divine Interpreter', *NetHymnal*, [www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/c/d/cdinterp.htm](http://www.cyberhymnal.org/htm/c/d/cdinterp.htm).

21. *The Holy Bible: New International Version Inclusive Language Edition* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1995), p. ix.
22. G. W. and D. E. Anderson, 'The New International Version: Inclusive Language Edition', *The Quarterly Record* no. 534, January to March 1996, p. 7.
23. Michael Marlowe, 'English Standard Version', *Bible Researcher*, [www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html](http://www.bible-researcher.com/esv.html).
24. G. W. and D. E. Anderson, *The English Standard Version* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2007), p. 12.
25. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.
26. *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Bibles, 2001), p. ix.
27. *Holy Bible: New King James Version* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1982), p. iii.
28. *Ibid.*, p. vii.
29. *New King James Version Study Edition*, 'The History of the King James Bible', p. 1235.
30. Spiros Zodhiates, *Hebrew-Greek Key Study Bible* (Atlanta, GA, USA: AMG Publishing, 2008), p. 1593.
31. For a list of examples of these omissions see M. H. Watts, *The NKJV: a Critique* (London: Trinitarian Bible Society, 2008), pp. 8ff.
32. See G. W. and D. E. Anderson, *What today's Christian needs to know about The New King James Version* (London: the Trinitarian Bible Society, 1995), pp. 12-13.