

The King James Version and the English Language

Spring Lecture, 2011

Bible Baptist Church & Theological Seminary

Cromwell, Connecticut

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I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts.

I have seen an end of all perfection: but thy commandment is exceeding broad.

O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day.

Psalm 119:63, 96-97

*Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me
the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name,*

O LORD God of hosts.

Jeremiah 15:16

Four centuries ago this year, at Northumberland House in Aldersgate Street, London, “using newly cast type on high-quality linen and rag paper,”¹ one Robert Barker, ‘Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majestie,’ published for the first time what has been called “the noblest monument of English prose,”² “the outstanding English classic,”³ “a perfect treasure of heavenly instruction”⁴ “the greatest vehicle of literacy,”⁵ “the greatest work in prose ever written in English,”⁶ “the only literary masterpiece ever to have been produced by a committee,”⁷ and “the very greatest literary achievement in the English language.”⁸ This book, “the gold standard for a literary Bible”⁹ and “the crown jewel of English literature... [whose] influence on the English-speaking world is as much due to the beauty of its expression as its accuracy of translation,”¹⁰ was the King James Version (KJV) of the Holy Bible. It was not an immediate success.

Commissioned at Hampton Court in 1604 by James come fresh from Scotland, this new English Bible, the latest in a string of such, was at first ill-received. To the bishops, it smacked of novelty, and change of any kind was a threat to their place and power. The Puritans, on the other hand, saw on its pages High Church fingerprints and clung to their familiar Geneva Bible with its

¹ Alister E. McGrath, *In The Beginning* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 200.

² John Livingston Lowes, quoted by Leland Ryken, *The Word of God in English* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 258.

³ Leland Ryken, *The Legacy of the King James Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2011), 123.

⁴ From the *New Hampshire Confession*.

⁵ Ryken, *Legacy*, 92

⁶ Adam Nicholson, *God’s Secretaries* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), xi.

⁷ Ryken, *Legacy*, 123

⁸ Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch in a series of lectures given during World War I, quoted in McGrath, 1.

⁹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 122.

¹⁰ Bible collector Donald Brake, quoted in Ryken, *Legacy*, 123.

Calvinist notes. We do not know how the Baptists felt about it, for the Baptists weren't invited. But we do know later Baptists like John Bunyan loved it.

Despite this clouded beginning, "the masterpiece of 1611"¹¹ eventually eclipsed all others and stood alone as the sun in the English sky, of Bibles in that language "the greatest of all translations."¹²

In honoring the magnificent majesty of the King James Version (KJV) on this its fourth centennial, it is this writer's privilege to discuss the King James Bible and the English language. It is a broad topic. To make it manageable, I have organized the subject under five heads, each of these a question:

- 1. What has been the impact of the King James Version on the English language?**
- 2. Who attests to that impact?**
- 3. Why has it had such an impact?**
- 4. How does the impact of the King James Version compare with the impact of other English versions?**
- 5. Where do we go from here?**

No other book has influenced English like the King James Version of the Bible. Aside from its supremacy as the Word of God¹³ in English, the King James is *the* pre-eminent work of English literature. Without a keen familiarity with the King James Bible, no English-speaking person can be said to be truly educated.

Is this hyperbole, the exaggeration of a partisan? Having received the King James Bible as the Word of God¹⁴ in his native tongue and having experienced¹⁵ its vivifying power,¹⁶ this writer gladly confesses his opinion that, like Goliath's sword in the hand of David, of all English Bibles, of the King James alone may it be said, *There is none like that; give it me.*¹⁷

¹¹ Alexander M. Witherspoon, *et al*, *The College Survey of English Literature* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1951), 310.

¹² "The greatest of all translations is the English Bible. It is even more than that: it is the greatest of English books, the first of English classics, the source of the greatest influence upon English character and speech. Apart from any questions of dogma and theology, the Bible has all the marks of a classic. Its themes are those of perpetual concern in great literature: God, Man and the Universe. It has, in spite of its vast diversity, a supreme unity." Yale University Professor Albert Cooke, quoted by Ian R. K. Paisley, *My Plea for the Old Sword* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador Productions, 1997), 59.

¹³ "I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name." Psalm 138:2.

¹⁴ "For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." I Thessalonians 2:13.

¹⁵ "Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever." I Peter 1:23.

¹⁶ "It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." John 6:63.

¹⁷ I Samuel 21:9.

Surely many share this enthusiasm. They need not that any man teach them the glories of the King James translation. But in the hope of edifying them and of presenting the facts to a candid world, let us consider the question of the King James Version and the English language.

I. What has been the impact of the King James Version on the English language?

No other book has influenced English the way the KJV has. As Luther's translation transformed the German language, so the KJV did the English.¹⁸ With what have been called "phrases of lapidary beauty,"¹⁹ "the King James Bible ... exercised enormous influence on the development of the language."²⁰ It elevated English,²¹ standardized it, stabilized it, and in following centuries so permeated it that the King James Bible, and not just any Bible, pervades life throughout the English-speaking world.

Worldwide, "the King James Bible was a landmark in the history of the English language, and an inspiration to poets, dramatists, artists, and politicians. The influence of this work has been incalculable."²² In this country, Connecticut's own Noah Webster said, "the language of the Bible has no inconsiderable influence in forming and preserving our national language."²³ His Bible was the KJV. It is impossible to overstate the impact of the King James Bible on the English language.

The King James Bible elevated the English language. English in 1611 was still in flux, its forms unset, its course unclear. Rising from the Germanic languages mixed with Norse, Latin, and French, emergent English was a clouded pool. To this the words of God affected English as Elisha's salt the deadly spring.²⁴ God healed the noxious waters.²⁵

An essentially literal translation not from Latin, as was Wycliffe's, but from the Hebrew and Greek, the KJV by the infusion of its sound words into English so elevated the language that it was changed forever. Such will be the case when the pure words of God²⁶ sanctify a heathen

¹⁸ "What was once scorned as the barbarous language of plowmen became esteemed as the language of patriots and poets – a language fit for heroes on the one hand, and for the riches of the Bible on the other." McGrath, 24-25.

¹⁹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 155.

²⁰ David Crystal, *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 59.

²¹ "The struggle for an English Bible... also rested on a hesitancy on the part of many concerning the merits of the English language. It is not generally realized that the languages of the elite in English society in the early fourteenth century were French and Latin. English was seen as the language of peasants, incapable of expressing anything other than the crudest and most basic of matters. English was just fine when dealing with spreading dung on fields. But how could such a barbaric language do justice to such sophisticated matters as philosophy or religion? To translate the Bible from its noble and ancient languages into English was seen as a pointless act of debasement." McGrath, 24.

²² McGrath, 1.

²³ Quoted by McGrath, 294.

²⁴ II Kings 2:20-22.

²⁵ Much of this richness arises from the careful translation of Hebrew idioms. Hebrew being the language God bestowed on man in Eden, it is therefore the most robust and rich of narrative tongues. It follows that introducing its idioms would fructify and enrich the fallow ground of English.

²⁶ "The words of the LORD are pure words: as silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times. Thou shalt keep them, O LORD, thou shalt preserve them from this generation for ever." Psalm 12:6-7.

tongue. As the Word can do with a man, the Word can do with a language, lifting it from the heaps of husks to walk on its high places.²⁷ Oxford University's Alister McGrath states, "The glory of the King James Bible was that the English language was raised to new heights by being put to the service of this supreme goal – the rendering in English of the words and deeds of God."²⁸ When such rendering is done reverently, skillfully, and accurately, the effect will always be to uplift and sanctify.

The King James Bible did both. It elevated and was itself the highest elevation of the English language.²⁹ Scripture called forth new words to be invented³⁰ and old words put to highest use. McGrath calls the creation of the King James "one of the high points of English literary achievements and perhaps the greatest contribution to the spiritual ennobling of the human race"³¹ Outshining even Shakespeare,³² the eloquent KJV remains the Everest of English.³³

The King James Bible elevated the English language. It also standardized³⁴ and stabilized it.³⁵ God's words are pure. They bring purity to a language. God's words³⁶ are everlasting.³⁷ They bring fixity to a language. God's words settle that language in time as they themselves are forever settled in Heaven.³⁸

²⁷ "The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments." Habakkuk 3:19

²⁸ McGrath, 305.

²⁹ The KJV "...stands pre-eminent when side by side with more modern versions, not only for its devout adherence to the original texts, but also for the beauty of its style... So true is this, that whereas neighbouring nations have had, within a short period, a succession of versions of the Bible in their respective languages, to the detriment of union and of uniformity among the readers of the Bible in those countries, the English Version has stood on its own merits, and has shone of its own luster for nearly two centuries and a half." Solomon Caesar Malan *Vindication of the Authorized Version*, quoted in Paisley, 65.

³⁰ "Tyndale's commitment to preserving the very words of the original was so strong that he actually invented new English words to reproduce the very words of the Hebrew and Greek original – words like *intercession*, *atonement*, and *Passover*." Ryken, *Legacy*, 28.

³¹ McGrath, 277.

³² In light of the eloquence of the KJV, some have suggested that Shakespeare was called in as stylistic consultant. To this unfounded suggestion, Paisley retorts, "That Book did not require an injection of Shakespeare's poetry or majesty. It had a poetry which relegated some of Shakespeare's lines to the place of doggerel. It had a majesty which banished Shakespeare's gilding to utter ignominy and shame. That Book had the Majesty of all majesties, the Chastity of all chastities and the Eternity of all eternities. Its Majesty is the Gloriousness of God. Its Chastity is the Holiness of God. Its Eternity is the Agelessness of God." Paisley, 63.

³³ "The King James Bible is the very touchstone of exaltation and affective power. As I did the research for this book, this dimension of the King James Bible kept surfacing." Ryken, *English*, 270.

³⁴ "When a nation has achieved this manner of diction, these rhythms for its dearest beliefs, a literature is surely established... The Authorized Version set a seal on our national style... It has cadences homely and sublime, yet so harmonises them that the voice is always one. Simple men – holy men of heart like Izaak Walton and Bunyan – have their lips touched and speak to the homelier tune." Sir Arthur Quiller Clough, "Reading the Bible" lectures at Cambridge University, quoted in Paisley, 61.

³⁵ "For independently of the words of the Bible being sacred in all languages, the language of the English Bible in particular is consecrated... the vernacular translation of the Bible has formed and fixed the language of the country." Malan, quoted in Paisley, 68.

³⁶ Jesus said, *Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away.* Matthew 24:35

³⁷ "Since the Scriptures come from and reside in God, they are eternal." Gary LaMore, "God's Providential Preservation of the Scriptures," in Kent Brandenburg, ed., *Thou Shalt Keep Them* (El Sobrante, CA: Pillar & Ground Publishing, 2003), 230.

³⁸ *For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven.* Psalm 119:89.

Such was the case with the King James translation.³⁹ What was in flux was now fixed. Style and syntax, aphorism and expression became rooted in English thought with such felicity of expression in the KJV as to enter the memory, conserving the best of the past and restraining the corruptions of the future. As McGrath says, “The King James Bible consolidated the enormous advances in the English language over the centuries, and can be seen as the symbol of a nation and language that their moment had finally arrived.”⁴⁰

Published in rapid succession, British editions of the KJV became the book of workman and scholar alike.⁴¹ Unlike the “learned twaddle”⁴² of modern translations, the language of the King James Bible “shaped the speech of England.”⁴³

But not England only. In the New World, the KJV had tremendous effect. The first Bible printed in colonial America⁴⁴ was the King James Bible.⁴⁵ It cemented the “solid, near-absolute dependence of this new adventurous nation on KJV,”⁴⁶ including us in its elevating and stabilizing influence. As McGrath⁴⁷ observes, “Cut off from their linguistic homeland, the colonists found that the text of the Bible was an important means of sustaining both their religious faith and their English prose. Both their faith and their language was nourished and governed by the King James translation.”⁴⁸ Wherever it was read or spoken after 1611, English was a language stabilized and standardized by this monument of truth everlasting and unchangeable.

³⁹ Adam Clarke: “our translators not only made a standard translation, but they have made their translation the standard of our language. The English tongue, in their day, was not equal to such a work; but God enabled them to stand as upon Mount Sinai, and crane up their country’s language to the dignity of the originals, so that after the lapse of two hundred and fifty years, the English Bible is, with very few exceptions, the standard of the purity and excellence of the English tongue. The original, from which it was taken, is alone superior to the Bible translated by the authority of King James.” Paisley, 66.

⁴⁰ McGrath, 25.

⁴¹ “When we think of the high repute in which the Authorized Version is held by men of learning and renown, we must remember too, that in a special sense it has been the great book of the poor and unlettered. The one book that every household was sure to possess was the Bible; and it was read, sometimes ignorantly, sometimes unwisely, but always memorably. To many a poor man the English Bible has been a university, the kindly mother from whom he has drawn history, philosophy and a way of speech. The modern world has seen many changes; but it has, so far, seen no movement that has shaken the supremacy of the greatest of English books. If ever the Bible falls from its high sovereignty, we may be sure that the English character has fallen with it.” Paisley, 59-60, quoting Cooke, 178, 180

⁴² George Sayles Bishop in his work p. 61, quoted in Paisley, 59-60.

⁴³ Ibid., 62.

⁴⁴ “The King James Bible was the Bible of America’s Founding Fathers In September, 1782, the [Second Continental] Congress passed a resolution commending the first printing of the Bible in the United States by a man named Robert Aiken. [It observed that] Mr. Aiken . . . undertook this expensive work at a time when, from the circumstances of the war, an English edition of the Bible could not be imported nor any opinion formed how long obstruction might continue. On this account particularly he deserves applause and encouragement.” Mike Norris, “The King James Bible – 400 Years,” *Unpublished Word* (Murfreesboro, TN: First Bible International), Winter, 2011, 7

⁴⁵ Robert Aitken, Philadelphia.

⁴⁶ David Daniell, quoted in Ryken *Legacy*, 54.

⁴⁷ Born in 1953, McGrath was given, as was every child born that coronation year, “a copy of the Bible by command of the queen. . . . It was a copy of . . . the King James Bible.” McGrath, ix.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 294.

The King James Bible also permeated the English language. For Britain, it was “the book of the Empire,”⁴⁹ for America, the book of the schools.⁵⁰ Noah Webster used it for his definitions, McGuffey for his alphabet.⁵¹ Many a mother by her fireside taught her child to read by the King James Bible. Many a man of greatness found in it the greatest genius of his eloquence.⁵² Its rich rhythms and sonorous sounds styled for public reading⁵³ took ready root in the ears and hearts, minds and mouths of the English-speaking peoples. Ryken says the KJV “was the atmosphere within which Christians lived and moved and had their being for nearly four centuries...the great primer...[from which] the English-speaking world learned to read and to think.”⁵⁴

Wherever English went, the King James Bible went. It is fair to say that through the King James Bible, the Spirit of God made English the global gospel language before British commerce ever made English the global merchant language.⁵⁵ “The preaching of the King James Bible produced all of the revivals in the English-speaking world. All of the great hymns in the English language were written by King James Bible readers.”⁵⁶ The KJV became the Bible of American evangelism,⁵⁷ literalism, and Biblicism.

In public inscriptions and private plaques, on civic monuments and cemetery headstones, this Bible, both “a miracle and a landmark,”⁵⁸ has so permeated the English-speaking world as to be indelibly imprinted upon its patterns of thought and expression. Although there are many unaware of it, the wording of the King James Bible permeates the English language to this day.⁵⁹

⁴⁹ “the most venerated icon of British culture...[for] two centuries...triumphantly hailed as the book of the Empire,” Ryken, *Legacy* 87.

⁵⁰ “...until the middle part of the twentieth century the King James Bible was part of public school education.” *Ibid.*, 94.

⁵¹ The KJV was the dominant textbook in the earliest days of American education. William McGuffey, understanding “that knowing the Bible was of utmost importance in a child’s education,” made sure that his *New England Primer* had sections from the KJV and used verses from the KJV as its “alphabet of lessons for youth.” *Ibid.*, 94, 93.

⁵² Daniel Webster said, “From the time that at my mother’s feet or on my father’s knee I first learned to lisp verses from the sacred writings, they have been my daily study and vigilant contemplation. If there be anything in my style or thoughts to be commended, the credit is due to my kind parents in instilling into my mind an early love of the Scriptures.” *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵³ *For the ear trieth words, as the mouth tasteth meat.* Job 34:3

⁵⁴ Ryken, *Legacy*, 92.

⁵⁵ “The expansion of British economic and military influence in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was preceded and accompanied by missionary work, based on the King James Bible. Wherever English-language versions of Christianity sprang up, these would usually be nourished by this definitive translation. The impact of the King James Bible on the language and worship of Christianity in Africa and Australasia has been immense.” McGrath, 290.

⁵⁶ Lloyd L. Streeter, *Seventy-Five Problems* (LaSalle, IL:First Baptist Church of LaSalle, 2001), 35.

⁵⁷ “The King James Bible was the Bible used in the modern missionary movement. ... The movement did not begin to diminish until the advent of the ‘new’ translations.” Norris, 7.

⁵⁸ Ryken, *Legacy*, 67 quoting J. Isaacs, published in Westport, CT.

⁵⁹ “The effect of the continual reading of the Bible on the character, imagination, and thought of the British and American peoples is greater, as all historians agree, than that of any other book or literary movement in English or European history. The great writers have been under the constant impact of its matchless poetry and prose, and its phrases have enriched the everyday speech of ordinary men and women. It cannot be replaced, nor should it be supplemented, by modern versions. To be ignorant of it is to be out of touch with the greatest single influence in both the literature and the life of England and America.” Witherspoon, 311.

The King James Bible not only elevated, standardized, and permeated the English language but also became the literary benchmark of the language by which all other works “continue to be judged.”⁶⁰ It remains *the* preeminent work of English literature. In 1868, Thomas Babington Macauley said, “If everything else in our language should perish it would alone suffice to show the whole extent of its beauty and power.”⁶¹ Just last month (March, 2011), American Robert Alter in the *Wall Street Journal* said that for writers, what the KJV did in 1611 is “still relevant today” and that “after 400 years, the King James Bible remains a stylistic model that writers might well want to emulate.”⁶²

With its homely vigor, concreteness, and directness of expression, the KJV has what scholars “overwhelmingly believe [to be a] . . . literary excellence. . . nothing short of miraculous.”⁶³ This is from a literary stylist who despite (or perhaps because of) his work with the English Standard Version grows perceptibly more admiring⁶⁴ in his appreciation of the KJV.⁶⁵

As Ryken rightly observes, “In the development of the English language, in English-speaking subcultures of non-Western countries, in the lives of Christians individually and corporately, in education, and in religious discourse, the King James Bible was the omnipresent framework for the English-speaking world for approximately three centuries.”⁶⁶ Within the generation of its release, the KJV became *the* defining benchmark of greatness in English literature. This has been the influence of the King James Version of the Bible. It is the greatest work in the English language.

II. Who attests to the impact of the King James Version on the English language?

Many attest to the impact of the King James Version. Let us organize them into five sources: one, the testimony of others. This could be called objective testimony. Two, there is the testimony in the believer. This could be called subjective testimony. Three is testimony from the culture, the inescapable influence of the King James Bible wherever English has gone. Four is testimony from its opponents. Fifth, last, and most important is the testimony of God Himself.

⁶⁰ “In popular Christian culture, the King James translation is seen to possess a dignity and authority that modern translations somehow fail to convey. . . . Other translations will doubtless jostle for place in the nation’s bookstores in the twenty-first century. Yet the King James Bible retains its place as a literary and religious classic, by which all others continue to be judged.” McGrath, 300.

⁶¹ Quoted in Ryken *Legacy*, 66.

⁶² Robert Alter, “The Good Book’s Great Prose Lessons,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 5-6, 2011.

⁶³ Ryken, *Legacy*, 123.

⁶⁴ Ryken did not start out a “KJV man,” nor is he completely one now. But after researching the translations, he confessed in 2002, “I ended up where I had not envisioned – with a wholehearted defense of essentially literal translations in the King James tradition, and as a critic of dynamic equivalence.” – Ryken, *English*, 18. Nine years later (2011), he further admits “that in the past I have too glibly pronounced the KJV suspect in accuracy” and “that the allegations against the KJV are rarely supported by honest argument.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 14-15.

⁶⁵ “Stylistically, the KJV is the greatest English Bible translation ever produced. Its style combines simplicity and majesty as the original requires, though it inclines toward the exalted. Its rhythms are matchless. Many of its aphoristic statements passed into common English usage. Beginning with Milton, the KJV has been *the* translation for English-speaking authors and composers. . . . The best tribute to its uniqueness is that it is often parodied but never successfully paralleled.” Ryken, *English*, 51.

⁶⁶ Ryken, *Legacy*, 98.

First, testimony from others. Those outside Biblical Christianity *per se* give unstinting testimony to the impact of the King James Bible on the English-speaking world. Wherever men read, speak, or learn the language,⁶⁷ multitudes attest to the impact of the King James Bible. The evidence is overwhelming. It is clear. It is also clear that the impact of the King James Bible is not shared by other English versions. It belongs to the King James alone. Albert S. Cook, Professor of English Language and Literature at Yale University, said in 1920, “No other book has so penetrated and permeated the hearts and speech of the English race as has the Bible. What Homer was to the Greeks, and the Koran to the Arabs, that – or something not unlike it – the Bible has become to the English.”⁶⁸ Professor Cook’s Bible was the King James.

Statesmen give testimony to the influence of the KJV. Samuel Adams quoted the King James in speeches to his countrymen; John Adams in letters to his wife. George Washington made frequent reference to the Bible in his speech and writing, from “vine and fig tree” and “father of lights” to his favorite, to “do justice and love mercy.”⁶⁹ The Bible Washington used was the King James. On a plaque over President and Mrs. Washington’s tomb at Mount Vernon are the words of John 11:25-26.⁷⁰ They are from the King James.

During debate on the drafting of the Constitution, Benjamin Franklin cited Psalm 127:1a.⁷¹ He quoted the King James. Lincoln’s speeches “show a continuous influence of the King James...[and are] littered with biblical allusions.”⁷² Many we recognize: *a house divided*,⁷³ *fourscore*, *conceived*, *brought forth*, *malice*, and *charity*. All come from the King James.

A.E. Ellmore, student of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, “finds dozens of biblical echoes in Lincoln’s speech and concludes that ‘what gives Lincoln’s language its distinctive flavor is...that it is overwhelmingly biblical, with 269 of its 272 words appearing in some form in the King James.’”⁷⁴ In 1862, when he gave that Address, Lincoln’s Bible was the King James.⁷⁵ So was Jefferson Davis’s. So was Grant’s. So was Robert E. Lee’s.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ Ryken notes that the pervasive influence of the KJV in foreign cultures counters “a common misconception that Britain and North America are the only countries where the King James Bible exerted a cultural influence.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 89.

⁶⁸ McGrath, 253.

⁶⁹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 101.

⁷⁰ “I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” from John 11:25-26.

⁷¹ “Except the LORD build the house, they labor in vain that build it”

⁷² Ryken, *Legacy*, 102.

⁷³ Mark 3:25

⁷⁴ Ryken, *Legacy*, 102.

⁷⁵ “I am profitably engaged in reading the Bible. Take all this Book upon reason that you can and the balance upon faith and you will live and die a better man.” Abraham Lincoln quoted in Paisley, 111.

⁷⁶ In his Second Inaugural Address, referring to the then-present conflict between North and South, Lincoln said of the warring parties, “Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged.” Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1954), 664.

Perhaps the greatest British statesman of the Twentieth Century was Winston Churchill. Not a godly man but an educated man, he knew his Bible. He used it to keep England going. His great powers of oratory arose from being saturated with the Bible in his youth. It was the KJV.⁷⁷

Speaking to the House of Commons to condemn Chamberlain's appeasement of the Nazis at Munich, Churchill "quoted Daniel 5:27 from memory in approximately its KJV form: 'Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting.'"⁷⁸ When war came, as war always comes when there is appeasement, Parliament called into service the men of England and Churchill called into service the great Bible of England. He well knew that the ancestral expressions of the King James Bible, echoing with overtones of religious and political liberty, would resonate in the people's very bones and fortify them in their darkest days. As they stood alone against the onslaught of pagan Nazism, Churchill drew deeply from the Bible to exhort his countrymen to faithfulness and valor. Churchill's Bible and England's war Bible was the King James.

Again on this side of the Atlantic, "Speeches on the floor of the US Congress... were until recently laced with King James formulas and allusions, and sometimes biblical references still occur."⁷⁹ George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Daniel Webster, Zell Miller, Robert Byrd – these and other men in public office extensively used the King James and seem to have used no other. Astronaut Buzz Aldrin quoted the KJV on the first space walk.⁸⁰ As President Theodore Roosevelt said, "No other book of any kind ever written in English, perhaps no other book ever written in any other tongue, has ever so affected the whole life of a people as this authorized version of the Scriptures has affected the life of the English-speaking peoples."⁸¹ From speeches on earth to speeches from space, history is replete with objective testimony to the great influence of the King James Bible.

Second, there is the testimony in the believer,⁸² what could be called subjective testimony. Jesus' sheep hear Jesus' voice.⁸³ As they have in no other translation, for four centuries God's English-speaking sheep have heard that voice in the King James Bible.⁸⁴ Not needing extensive marketing promotion as Modern Bibles have, the KJV and the same-text translations before it "in a sweetly natural way worked their way into the hearts of millions of God's people."⁸⁵

⁷⁷ Although Churchill "came at the end of the era of the KJV as the unchallenged English Bible for use in political discourse,... [he] kept the King James Bible alive in his nation's active vocabulary." Ryken, *Legacy*, 102

⁷⁸ Ryken, *Legacy*, 103.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 104

⁸⁰ Concluding his space walk in 1969, American astronaut Buzz Aldrin quoted Psalm 8:3 "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained."

⁸¹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 83.

⁸² "God has delivered His Book to the custody, not of the scholars, the universities, colleges, or seats of learning, but only to His saints." Paisley, 75.

⁸³ John 10:16, 27.

⁸⁴ Although the KJV is sometimes also called the Authorized Version (AV), its translation work having been authorized by James, it had no other authorization as regards its reception and use. These latter resulted from its ever-growing popularity among the pious. As Geddes MacGregor states, "Lacking official authorization, the King James Bible 'made its own way as a book whose excellence was admitted on all sides,' an authority 'far greater than could have been conferred on it by any legal instrument or official decree.' The King James Bible 'was authorized, not by an edict imposed upon the people, but by popular acclamation.'" Ryken, *Legacy*, 52.

⁸⁵ Jack Moorman, *Modern Bibles – the Dark Secret* (Los Osos, CA: Fundamental Evangelistic Association, 1992), 47.

Simple as it struck me at the time, my pastor and my Paul once said after trying the modern versions, “They don’t read like the Bible.”⁸⁶ Another man said after first finding the King James Bible and then finding our assembly, “No other Bible sounds like the Word of God. I tried other versions and found them vague, but when I read the King James, the meaning just exploded off the page.”⁸⁷ Subjective as these statements are, they testify⁸⁸ to the impact of the King James Bible on believers.

And they are not alone. To their testimony could be added that of countless others, like Marie Freisema of the Philippines, who said “the King James Version of the Bible has been the best English language teacher I ever had;”⁸⁹ and Vijai John of India. Growing up Catholic in southern India, he noticed that the Bible churches of his region “had a strong preference for the KJV and sometimes regarded other English translations as spurious. [For] language acquisition..., parents encouraged their children to read from the KJV rather than other English translations to gain an appreciation for the beauty of its language.”⁹⁰

To the objective testimony of others and the subjective testimony of believers can be added testimony from the culture as to the great influence of the King James Bible. The words of this Bible and no other English Bible seem to be everywhere. They have embedded themselves in English-speaking culture around the world. Engraved on the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia is Leviticus 25:10. It is from the King James Bible.⁹¹ The first words sent by telegraph were from Numbers 23:23. They were from the King James Bible.⁹² On a statue outside the United Nations headquarters in New York and a second time within it are the familiar “swords into plowshares” words from the King James Bible.⁹³ Over the gate of Harvard University is Isaiah 26:2. It is from the King James Bible;⁹⁴ on a stone outside Harvard’s Emerson Hall is Psalm 8:4.⁹⁵ It is from the King James Bible. As Ryken somewhat plaintively observes, “...the King James Bible is a leading means by which the Christian faith continues to assert its presence in institutions that began as Christian but have long since been secularized.”⁹⁶

⁸⁶ Richard Anderson, Calvary Independent Baptist Church of Tilton, NH, *circa* 1982, author’s recollection.

⁸⁷ This same man also noted the difficulty of doing words studies in non-KJV versions because of paraphrase and substitution of other words.

⁸⁸ Just this week, a man saved from a dissolute life told the writer, “The translation of the KJV has been blessed over the whole world. It comes from the same tree of texts as the German Bible. It has unique poetry memorization which gives retention far greater even for the affected brain. The paraphrases meander around. When you look up the words in the dictionary, they don’t mean the same thing. The paraphrases lose a lot of power.”

⁸⁹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 88.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof.” Leviticus 25:10b.

⁹² From Numbers 23:23, Samuel F.B. Morse sent these, the first words by wire, “What hath God wrought!”

⁹³ Although taken out of context and misapplied without Christ, they are “...and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.” Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3.

⁹⁴ Isaiah 26:2 “Open ye the gates, that the righteous nation which keepeth the truth may enter in,” sadly no longer appropriate at that long-apostate institution and no longer descriptive of its student body.

⁹⁵ Psalm 8:4 “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him?” Believers can only hope these, God’s words, will not return to Him void but may kindle faith unto salvation in some who may receive them even in that Godless environment.

⁹⁶ Ryken, *Legacy*, 107.

Added to the mute witness of monuments and gravestones is the eloquent testimony of writers, educators, composers, and artists of all kinds who have for centuries filled their work with allusions to and direct quotations of the King James Bible. Since 1611, the great writers of English “have woven its words” into our literature.⁹⁷ In his book, *The Bible as Literature*, T.R. Henn talks about the King James as having “a strange authority and power as a work of literature. It becomes one with the Western tradition,⁹⁸ because it is its single greatest source.”⁹⁹

Milton’s Bible was a King James Bible, 1612 edition.¹⁰⁰ Timothy Dwight’s Bible¹⁰¹ was the King James Bible,¹⁰² Dryden’s Bible, Ruskin’s Bible,¹⁰³ T.S. Eliot’s Bible the King James Bible. Faulkner and Hemingway and Steinbeck show in their works the imprint of the King James Bible. Tennyson alludes more to the KJV in his works than to any other single source.¹⁰⁴ As his career progressed, Melville quoted more and more from his King James Bible.¹⁰⁵ Wordsworth’s Bible was the King James Bible. He called it “the most interesting and instructive book...ever written”¹⁰⁶

⁹⁷ From *Bartlett’s Familiar Quotations* has been extracted a book titled *Bartlett’s Bible Quotations*. Over 200 pages long and containing quotations from the Bible that have passed into general use, it states that “all quotations come from the Authorized Version of the Bible,...surely the most influential book ever published in the English language.” The editor states that its selections “were introduced by the King James Bible, picked up in English vernacular, and entered popular imagination.” Ryken asserts that *Bartlett’s* “shows...that the King James Bible possesses the linguistic and stylistic qualities that enabled it to become the major influence on the development of the English language.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 86.

⁹⁸ Randall Stewart writes, “The Bible has been the greatest single influence on our [American] literature. Our writers, almost without exception, have been steeped in biblical imagery, phrasing, rhythms.” *Legacy*, 205

⁹⁹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 169.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰¹ “Timothy Dwight’s *A Dissertation on the History, Eloquence and Poetry of the Bible* can be seen as a strident affirmation of the literary value of the King James Bible, and an important anticipation of later attitudes toward the text.” McGrath, 304.

¹⁰² McGrath quotes at length from Samuel Jackson Pratt’s *The Sublime and Beautiful of Scripture*, dating from the same period as Timothy Dwight (1772), and in which Pratt promotes the Bible as entertainment not in the modern sense but in the highest intellectual and spiritual sense: “I am thus particularly earnest to display in this work the literary excellence of the Holy Bible, because I have reason to apprehend it is too frequently laid by under a notion of its being a dull, dry and unentertaining system, whereas the fact is quite otherwise: it contains all that can be *wished* by the truest intellectual taste, it enters more sagaciously and more deeply into human nature, it develops character, delineates manner, charms the imagination and warms the heart more effectively than any other book extant; and if once a man would take it into his hand without that strange prejudicing idea of flatness, and be willing to be pleased, I am morally certain he would find all his favorite authors dwindle in the comparison, and conclude that he was not only reading the most religious book but the most *entertaining* book in the world.” McGrath, 304.

¹⁰³ McGrath states that “historian John Ruskin (1819-1900) made it clear that his own work had been immeasurably shaped by the prose of the Bible, which he had absorbed deeply: ‘From Walter Scott’s novels I might easily, as I grew older, have fallen to other people’s novels; and Pope might, perhaps, have led me to take Johnson’s English, or Gibbons, as types of language; but, once knowing the 32nd of Deuteronomy, the 15th of First Corinthians, the Sermon on the Mount, and most of the Apocalypse, every syllable by heart, and having always a way of thinking with myself what words meant, it was not possible for me, even in the foolish times of youth, to write entirely superficial or formal English.’” McGrath, 304-305. Note that the Bible of Ruskin’s century was the KJV.

¹⁰⁴ Ryken, *Legacy*, 207.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 198.

William Blake thought the KJV so accurate to the original that it must have been “translated as well as written by the Holy Ghost.”¹⁰⁷ Coleridge once asked, “Did you ever meet any book that went to your heart so often and so deeply?”¹⁰⁸ William Styron said, “I consider the King James Version to be the *only* worthwhile version for its style and poetry.”¹⁰⁹ Dramatist George Bernard Shaw called the KJV “a translation so magnificent that to this day the common human Britisher or citizen of the United States accepts and worships it as a single book by a single author, the book being the Book of Books and the author being God.”¹¹⁰

W.H Auden called the KJV “immeasurably superior;” Eudora Welty, “all-supreme;” Christopher Fry, “unmatchable;”¹¹¹ John Dos Passos, “the fountainhead of good English prose;”¹¹² and poet Matthew Arnold, in his lectures *On Translating Homer*, said the translator “will find one English book and one only, where, as in the Iliad itself, perfect plainness of speech is allied with perfect nobleness, and that book is the Bible.”¹¹³ Arnold wrote in 1861. His book was the KJV.

Not only writers but educators too,¹¹⁴ until the present generation, paid near-unanimous homage to the great influence of the King James Bible. Even the “notorious non-Christian” H.L. Mencken “called the King James Bible ‘unquestionably the most beautiful book in the world.’”¹¹⁵ Dartmouth College in 1950 labeled it “one of the creative miracles of the English language...an ever-present influence and a part of everyday speech. Countless numbers love what one has called its ‘great organ tones’ and delight in the familiar form of its immortal passages.”¹¹⁶ Familiar form, immortal passages, the most beautiful book in the world – authors and educators attest to the influence of the King James Bible.

So do composers. From Handel’s *Messiah* to Mendelssohn’s *Elijah* and Haydn’s *The Creation*, as well as Rachmaninoff’s *Blessed is the Man*, countless composers have been moved to match

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 106.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 160.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ “In all these instances the Bible means the translation authorized by King James the First.... The translation was extraordinarily well done because to the translators what they were translating was not merely a curious collection of ancient books written by different authors in different ages of culture, but the word of God divinely revealed through His chosen and expressly inspired scribes. In this conviction they carried out their work with boundless reverence and care and achieved a beautifully artistic result. It did not seem possible to them that they could better the original texts; for who could improve on God’s own style? ...[N]or could they doubt that God would, as they prayed, take care that His message should not suffer corruption at their hands. In this state of exaltation they made a translation so magnificent that to this day the common human Britisher or citizen of the United States accepts and worships it as a single book by a single author, the book being the Book of Books and the author being God.” George Bernard Shaw, quoted in Paine, 182-183

¹¹¹ Ryken, *Legacy*, 160.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ McGrath, p. 218

¹¹⁴ “The King James Bible was the Bible that was taught in our original Bible colleges and seminaries. Most understand that the major Ivy League institutions like Harvard, Princeton, and Yale all began as institutions of higher learning to train men for the ministry. The Bible used in these institutions was the venerable King James Bible. These institutions and others did not depart from the use of the KJV until the 1930’s and 40’s. Up until that time, almost without exception, the Scripture used was the King James Bible.” Norris, 7.

¹¹⁵ Ryken, *English*, 161

¹¹⁶ Roy B. Chamberlain, Herman Feldman, et al., *The Dartmouth Bible* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950). xviii.

their music to the majesty of the KJV. Other names include Aaron Copland (“In the Beginning), John Rutter (“I Will Lift Up Mine Eyes”), Ralph Vaughan Williams, John Stainer, and Thomas Tallis. Truly, “a mighty stream has flowed from the KJV in our musical history,”¹¹⁷ and “unless we have evidence to the contrary, every [sacred musical] work composed between 1700 and 1950 is based on the King James Bible.”¹¹⁸

The King James Bible has influenced art as well. Rembrandt drew from this Bible. The Peaceable Kingdoms of Edward Hicks are from this Bible. Thomas Cole put into his landscapes and William Blake his visionary pieces themes from the KJV. One need not look far in almost any museum to find art inspired by this Bible and no other Bible. Western culture provides abundant testimony to the influence of the King James Bible.

The word of its adversaries provides a fourth testimony to the impact of the KJV. Many modern translators do their work less because of new manuscripts and more to dethrone the KJV.¹¹⁹ If the KJV had little influence, would it provoke such antagonism? Noting that “one member of the NIV translation team wrote ‘that a modern translation must ‘not be intimidated by the King James Version peering over its shoulder,’”¹²⁰ Ryken opines that in such a role, the KJV functioned as “a father figure who needed to be slain.” In light of the Fifth Commandment,¹²¹ his opinion is suggestive of the spiritual condition of some modern translators. It is also suggestive as to whether the blessing of God will ever attend their translations as it has the King James.

Fifth, last, and most important is the testimony of God Himself. Despite initially preferring the Geneva Bible, soon believers overwhelmingly embraced the KJV, God commending it to their hearts. Its unsurpassed influence and unparalleled longevity¹²² would not have been without the blessing of God. In the creation and impact of the KJV,¹²³ even the lost sense the miraculous. As Ryken states, “Something has fallen like a benediction on the King James Bible.”¹²⁴ Nothing like that has been said of any other version.

God blesses His word.¹²⁵ When translation and text are transparent, readers are effectively reading God’s words and God blesses. It cannot be otherwise. As McGrath points, “Perhaps the

¹¹⁷ Ryken, *Legacy*, 110-111.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹¹⁹ An analyst of many modern translations and a participant in one (the ESV), Leland Ryken frankly admits that among modern translators, “a genuine hostility to the King James tradition often emerges. - *Legacy* 81

¹²⁰ Ryken, *Legacy*, 72.

¹²¹ “Honor thy father and thy mother, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; that thy days may be prolonged, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee.” Deuteronomy 5:16

¹²² “On a historical scale, the sheer longevity of this version is a phenomenon, without parallel.... ‘King James’ is still the bestselling book in the world.... In the history of the earth we live on, its influence cannot be calculated.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 67.

¹²³ Secular historian Alexander Witherspoon, in *The College Survey of English Literature* (1951): “From a purely literary point of view, it is something of a miracle that the committee of scholars should have produced such a consistently beautiful book,” p. 310

¹²⁴ Ryken, *Legacy*, 152.

¹²⁵ “For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.” Isaiah 55:10-11

greatest tribute to its success lies in the fact that, for nearly two centuries, most of its readers were unaware that they were actually reading a *translation*. . . . For [George Bernard] Shaw, and his age, the King James translation of Bible *was* the Bible.”¹²⁶

Spiritual eyes cannot help seeing these as proofs of the blessing of God, God’s testimony to the veracity of the KJV. A divine blessing is upon this version like no other. From a reverent, eloquent, and accurate rendering of the originals, we should expect nothing less, for God has magnified His Word above all His Name.¹²⁷ To the believer’s ear, the King James Bible is that Word. It is, as Spurgeon puts it, “our Authorized Version, which will never be bettered, as I judge, till Christ shall come.”¹²⁸

III. Why has the King James Version had such an impact on the English language?

The ultimate reason for the unsurpassed impact of the KJV on the English language is the blessing of heaven. But of earthly reasons, this writer would suggest six. They are the time of the translation work, the texts used for translation, the translators themselves, the translation technique, the target or goal of the work, and last, by contrast and to account for their profound lack of impact, the intentional-dumbing down of modern English translations.

In the fullness of time, God sent forth His Son.¹²⁹ Roman law and the Greek language made the time of Christ’s birth perfect for the gospel. Similarly in 1611, English power and the English language made the timing of the KJV perfect.

It was perfect timing politically. Until less than a century earlier, putting any part of the Bible into English was perilous.¹³⁰ In the 1400’s, Wycliffe’s books were banned and his body burned. In “1513, John Colet – then dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral, London – was suspended from his position for translating the Lord’s Prayer into English,”¹³¹ a sentence mild compared to what happened to William Tyndale twenty-three years later (1536): for putting the New Testament and part of the Old into English, he was strangled and burned at the stake. Until the end of the sixteenth century, putting the Bible into English was very deadly business.¹³²

¹²⁶ McGrath 301

¹²⁷ “I will worship toward thy holy temple, and praise thy name for thy lovingkindness and for thy truth: for thou hast magnified thy word above all thy name.” Psalm 138:2

¹²⁸ Ryken, *Legacy*, quoted 96.

¹²⁹ Galatians 4:4.

¹³⁰ “To understand the story of the King James Bible, we have to take a brief look at the earlier history of the Bible in English. The story is one of martyrdom and repression. It starts with John Wyclif’s translation of the scriptures in the 1380’s, for which he was denounced as a heretic. The orthodox view was that to make the Bible accessible to the common people would threaten the authority of the Church, and lead the people to question its teaching. A scandalized contemporary wrote: ‘This Master Wyclif translated from Latin into English – the Angle not the angel speech – and so the pearl of the Gospel is scattered abroad and trodden underfoot by swine.’ This sentiment was echoed by the seventeenth-century philosopher Thomas Hobbes who sourly observed: ‘After the Bible was translated into English every man, nay, every boy and wench that could read English, thought they spoke with God Almighty and understood what he said.’” Robert McCrum, William Cran, and Robert MacNeil, *The Story of English* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1986), 110.

¹³¹ McGrath, p. 33

¹³² “Translating and publishing God’s word in the language of the people was as revolutionary an act as, in the eighteenth century, advancing the proposition that states should be ruled by democracy not kings.” McCrum, 110.

But that time passed. Elizabeth passed. Social, political, and religious pressures long ignored by her had made England “a cauldron which had not been allowed to boil.”¹³³ With the old queen’s death in 1603 and the new king’s coronation the next year, hopes ran high. As Nicolson puts it, “A change of monarch in an age of personal rule meant not only a change of government and policy, but a change of culture, attitude and belief. A new king meant a new world.”¹³⁴ New things were possible, even harmonizing the factions within the Church of England. This was the Puritans’ hope. It was the new King’s hope.¹³⁵ Unto this hope came the Millenary Petition.¹³⁶ Out of it came a new translation. The timing was perfect politically.

The timing was also perfect linguistically.¹³⁷ English as a language was at its flood. It was just attaining the flower of its age. From rustic origins, sprinkled with French and Latin, English had reached its moment of greatness. Samuel Johnson observes that “every language has a time of rudeness antecedent to perfection, as well as of false refinement and declension.” For Samuel Johnson, the age of the KJV was “the golden age of our language.”¹³⁸

Never before had English been so supple, so rich and rhythmic, so attuned to its own ear.¹³⁹ Never after would it have the subtlety to express itself as it did in this, its shining hour.¹⁴⁰ As a

¹³³ Nicolson, 3.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ “The outcome of [James’s] violent, threatened youth was not someone filled with vitriol and vengeance, ...but...a longing for acceptance and a desire for a life and a society in which all conflicting demands were reconciled and where all factions felt at home. ...Scotland was not suited for amity. But England was different and for James it must have seemed that at last, that dream of coherence would become a reality.” Nicolson, 9-10.

¹³⁶ “In January 1604 James presided over a special conference at Hampton Court. This was a gathering of bishops and Puritan divines to discuss and reconcile religious differences. Out of their deliberations emerged a plan which would provide the English language with one of its great renaissance masterpieces, a work whose impact on the history of English prose has been as fundamental as Shakespeare’s: the Authorized Version of the Bible.” McCrum, 110.

¹³⁷ “Not only was the English language by 1611 in a more opportune condition than it had ever been before or ever would be again, but the Hebrew and the Greek likewise had been brought up with the accumulated treasures of their materials to a splendid working point. The age was not distracted by the rush of mechanical and industrial achievements. Moreover linguistic scholarship was at its peak. Men of giant minds, supported by excellent physical health, had possessed in a splendid state of perfection a knowledge of the languages and literature necessary for the ripest Biblical scholarship.” Jack Moorman, *Forever Settled* (Collingswood, NJ: The Dean Burgon Society Press, 1999), 244.

¹³⁸ McGrath, 254

¹³⁹ “The Elizabethans had initiated a renaissance in spoken and written English. Under the Jacobean this achievement began to be standardized and disseminated throughout the British Isles, and spread overseas to the New World as the language of a united nation. James became, at a stroke, the most powerful Protestant king in Europe, and he adopted, for the purposes of foreign policy, the title ‘Great Britain.’ The language of this enlarged state was now poised to achieve international recognition. Of all the ways in which James left his mark on the English language, none was to match the influence of the new translation of the Bible ordered in the second year of his reign.” McCrum, 110.

¹⁴⁰ “The English language in 1611 was in the very best condition to receive into its bosom the Old and New Testaments. The past forty years had been years of extraordinary growth in English literature. Prose writers and poets...had combined to spread abroad a sense of literary style and to raise the standard of literary taste. Under the influence, conscious or unconscious, of literary masters [of the forty years prior to 1611], the revisers wrought out of the material left to them by Tyndale and his successors into the splendid monument of Elizabethan prose which the Authorized Version is universally admitted to be. ...Since then, words have lost that living, pliable breadth.” Moorman, *Settled*, 245.

national language, English was coming into its own. As Jesus came in the fullness of time,¹⁴¹ the King James Bible did as well. Men ought not to think that the Age of Shakespeare gave us the KJV but that the Age of the KJV gave us Shakespeare.¹⁴²

Although Nicolson states that “the King James Bible is a flower that grows from the deep mulch of sixteenth-century England,”¹⁴³ the truth is that the King James Bible lifted the language out of itself. King James’ wording is not Elizabethan wording. It was archaic even for its time, cast in forms already old to give God’s words a timeless dignity.¹⁴⁴ Of the King James, unknowing critics of our day protest, “We don’t speak the way they did back then.” The truth is, back then they didn’t either!¹⁴⁵ God’s words transformed everything. The result enlightens the understanding, elevates the mind, refines the thinking, molds the heart, and shapes the speech.¹⁴⁶ The timing was perfect politically and linguistically.

The timing was also perfect for translation. This work was not new. They built on what had gone before, Tyndale most of all.¹⁴⁷ The translators embraced the truth that what they did was the culmination of a “long process of version upon version [that] served (to use Dante’s phrase) as ‘a sieve for noble words.’”¹⁴⁸ As McGrath states,

It is impossible to overlook the fact that the King James translators did not begin to translate with blank sheets of paper in front of them. They stood in a long line of translators, and were conscious that their task would be influenced considerably...by the English translations already in circulation. ...In that each successive [prior English] translation drew upon those that preceded it, the earliest of the translations – that of William Tyndale – can thus be seen to have had a considerable effect on its successors.

¹⁴¹ “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Galatians 4:4-5

¹⁴² “The King James Bible, along with the works of William Shakespeare, is regularly singled out as one of the most foundational influences on the development of the modern English language. It is no accident that both date from the late English Renaissance, when English was coming into its own as a language.” McGrath, 253.

¹⁴³ Nicolson, 202.

¹⁴⁴ “Far from our Bible being a product of that day’s literary style, the English language after 1611 owes its development to the Authorized Version! ‘The King James Version was a landmark in the development of English prose. Its elegant yet natural style had enormous influence on English-speaking writers’ (World Book Encyclopedia). This partially explains why the AV is ever fresh and lucid while most else from that period is quite difficult to read.” Moorman, *Modern Bibles*, 40.

¹⁴⁵ “...the AV is not Elizabethan English! ...there is a great difference between AV English and the worldly, affectatious Elizabethan style” Moorman, *Modern Bibles*, 40.

¹⁴⁶ “The Authorized Version breathes the reverence of the Holy Bible of which it is the translation. ...The reverence of the original Scripture has been wonderfully preserved in the Authorized Version translation. There is a sacredness, a reverence, and a spiritual uniqueness about the sentences, the words, and the syllables which make them unsurpassably pre-eminent above all other English translations.” Paisley, 93, 95.

¹⁴⁷ “The Authorized Version was the culmination of some 100 years of preparation. There was intensive study of the Greek Text (not to mention Hebrew). The five Greek editions of Erasmus, the four of Stephanus, the nine of Beza provided the translators with a refined text, representative of that which was in the majority of manuscripts, and had been acknowledged (John 16:13) by God’s people through the centuries. There were no fewer than seven ‘preparatory’ English translations: Tyndale, Coverdale, Matthews, Great, Taverners, Geneva, and Bishops. The AV translators themselves were men of unparalleled scholarship, representing the combined intellectual might of Oxford and Cambridge. But far more importantly, they were marked by a holy awe and deep reverence for the Word of God. It is this latter that places them poles apart from the translating teams of today.” Moorman, *Dark Secret*, 40.

¹⁴⁸ – Literary scholar John Livingston Lowes, quoted in Ryken, *Legacy*, 38.

Lying behind this is an attitude toward wisdom that has largely been lost in the modern period.¹⁴⁹ Writers of the Renaissance were conscious of standing within a stream of cultural and intellectual achievement, from which they benefited and to which they were called to contribute. The wisdom of the past was to be appropriated in the present.¹⁵⁰

The KJV was the summit of centuries of English translation work.¹⁵¹ It was conservative, preservationist,¹⁵² and reverent.¹⁵³ “They were winnowing the best from the past.”¹⁵⁴ There was continuity of text. There was continuity of formal equivalence. The translators made no effort to depart from things past because they did not want to overthrow what had been ably done. Their goal was to make of many good translations one perfect one.¹⁵⁵ This fact alone makes the KJV distinct from modern translations¹⁵⁶ in that many of them are done with the express goal of overthrowing the KJV/TR tradition. This was not the case in 1611. Politically, linguistically, and as the culmination of centuries of prior work, the timing of the King James translation is the first reason for its tremendous impact.

The text used is the second. The Old Testament text was the Masoretic Text (MT), the text of the synagogues. The New Testament was the Textus Receptus (TR),¹⁵⁷ the “text received by all”¹⁵⁸

¹⁴⁹ And, I would add, lost in the modern translations.

¹⁵⁰ McGrath, p. 176

¹⁵¹ “The KJV ‘was no sudden miracle but rather the harvesting or refining of the previous century’s experience in translating the Bible into English. Tyndale, Coverdale, and their successors stand behind it.” Quoting Craig R. Thompson, Ryken, *English*, 60.

¹⁵² “it is not the poetry of a single mind, nor the effusion of a singular vision, nor even the product of a single moment, but the child of an entire culture stretching back to the great Jewish poets and storytellers...” Nicolson, xii.

¹⁵³ “The translators lived in an age of faith, and had a conviction that they were handling, as Wyclif put it, ‘the deep things of God.’ They had the advantage of all the English versions that had come before them. They wrote at a time when the English language was at the highest point of strength and beauty it had yet reached. Poetry was in the air, and English speech had a natural stateliness which it has since lost.” Witherspoon, 310.

¹⁵⁴ Nicolson, xiii.

¹⁵⁵ Miles Smith: “Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfected at the same time, and later thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we, building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavor to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they [the earlier translators], we persuade ourselves, if they were alive, would thank us.” McGrath, pp. 192-193

¹⁵⁶ “Approximately two and a half centuries lie between the two eras of greatest translation activity. The first era represented an evolutionary process in which each translation built upon the previous ones until the story reached its climax in the King James translation. The story of translation in the past half century is not such a story of cooperative collaboration but is instead a story of individual attempts to be innovative and different.” Ryken, *English*, 55

¹⁵⁷ “Of the 5000 plus Greek manuscripts for the New Testament, over ninety percent of them are in consentient agreement with each other. It is from these 90% or so manuscripts that textual scholars in the “TR Tradition” (Byzantine Text) based their TR editions. The remaining manuscripts represent the minority text of the CT and not only disagree with the 90% of manuscripts, but they also disagree with one another quite frequently.” Thomas M. Strouse, *The Lord God Hath Spoken* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Publications, 2007), 25.

¹⁵⁸ *For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.* John 17:8 *For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.* I Thessalonians 2:13.

the churches¹⁵⁹ from the earliest days of the Christian era,¹⁶⁰ the text of Luther and Tyndale and Coverdale.¹⁶¹ Although there were corrupt variants, the translators rejected them. Not one entertained the idea of using anything else. Their faith taught them that “God did not inspire two different Bibles.”¹⁶² The text used made the King James Bible have its great impact.

Third, the translators made the KJV have its great impact. Never before or since has assembled for English Bible translation so august and competent an array of men.”¹⁶³ They were skilled. They were reverent. They were hard-working.¹⁶⁴ They formed “a roll call of the best scholars in Hebrew, Greek, and biblical knowledge,”¹⁶⁵ yet most important of all, they were humble.¹⁶⁶ They trembled at God’s word.¹⁶⁷

At five, John Bois could read the Hebrew. At six, he could write it. At fourteen, he enrolled in Cambridge University. He was said to be “so familiar with the Greek Testament that he could at any time turn to any word it contained.”¹⁶⁸ Conversant in fifteen languages, Lancelot Andrewes was called “a library,”¹⁶⁹ a “star of the preachers...a right godly man...a prodigious student. The

¹⁵⁹ “The Holy Spirit persuades believers to adopt the same view of the Scriptures that Jesus believed and taught during the days of His earthly ministry....Jesus believed that these Scriptures were inspired by the Holy Spirit (Mark 12:36), that not one word of them could be denied (John 10:35), that not one particle of them could perish (Matt. 5:18), and that everything written in them was Divinely authoritative (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). ...This same high view of the Old Testament Scriptures was held and taught by Christ’s Apostles. ...To the Apostles, ‘It is written,’ was equivalent to, ‘God says.’” Gary LaMore, “God’s Providential Preservation of the Scriptures,” in Brandenburg, 229.

¹⁶⁰ Perhaps the strongest theological argument for holding to the TR as the preserved words of God is simply that the position itself arises from a strong sense of the mighty power and faithfulness of God Himself. TR adherents believe in a God Whose wisdom foresaw the need for an inspired and preserved Scripture, and Whose omnipotence guaranteed that men throughout Christian history would have one. One wonders about the theology of those who are still in the process of deciding upon the best of numerous readings in their Greek NT. Strouse, 115-116.

¹⁶¹ Crystal, 59

¹⁶² Paul L. Freeman, *Bible Doctrines Affected by New Modern Versions* (Catasauqua, PA: Race Street Baptist Church, n.d.), 1.

¹⁶³ “There probably has never been assembled at one time a greater group of English-speaking scholars of biblical languages. These men were head and shoulders higher in their expertise of Greek and Hebrew than any other body of English translators before or since. God’s providential preparation is thus apparent.” David H. Sorenson, *Touch Not The Unclean Thing*. (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001), 204.

¹⁶⁴ “...one thing they [the translators] shared during the process of translation as an unusual capacity for work. Some of the translators were married, and some were single. They were middle-aged and were on average fifty years old – scholars in their prime.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 49.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.

¹⁶⁶ “The book they created was consciously poised in its rhetoric between vigour and elegance, plainness and power. It is not framed in the language, as one Puritan preacher described it, of ‘fat and strutting bishops, pomp-fed prelates,’ nor of Puritan controversy or intellectual display. It aimed to step beyond those categories to embrace the universality of its subject. As a result, it does not suffer from one of the defining faults of the age: a form of anxious and egotistical self-promotion. It exudes, rather, a shared confidence and authority and in that is one of the greatest of all monuments to the suppression of ego.” Nicolson, xii.

¹⁶⁷ “For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the LORD: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Isaiah 66:2

¹⁶⁸ Sorenson, 209.

¹⁶⁹ “The man was a library, the repository of sixteen centuries of Christian culture, he could speak fifteen modern languages and six ancient, but the heart and bulk of his existence was his sense of himself as a worm. Against an all-knowing, all-powerful and irresistible God, all he saw was an ignorant, weak and irresolute self. ...People like Lancelot Andrewes no longer exist. But the presence in one man of what seemed to be such divergent

world wanted learning to know how learned this man was.”¹⁷⁰ John Reynolds was “the very treasure of erudition...a living library, and a third university.”¹⁷¹ Edward Lively was “one of the best linguists in the world...a man of great respect and one of the greatest Hebraists of the era.”¹⁷² Miles Smith, possessed of “utmost meekness and benevolence,” was as familiar with Greek, Latin, Chaldee, Syriac, and Arabic as with his native tongue.¹⁷³

Despite their high training, they saw themselves as translators not commentators. They were stewards of God’s words. Their job was translation not paraphrase, to say in English what God said not what He meant. They saw themselves not as God’s editors but as God’s secretaries.¹⁷⁴

Time, text, and translator mean nothing in bringing the words of God into another tongue if there be not the proper translation technique.¹⁷⁵ Translation technique is the fourth reason for the impact of the KJV.

Their translation technique was literal. They avoided paraphrase.¹⁷⁶ As much as language limitations would allow, they translated word-for-word. This is now called formal equivalence.¹⁷⁷ At the time, no other approach was even thought of. No other approach would have seemed logical.¹⁷⁸ No other approach seems logical to this day.¹⁷⁹

They knew nothing of Nida and the fraud¹⁸⁰ of “dynamic equivalence.”¹⁸¹ To them, the Bible was not a work of inspired ideas from the mind of God to the mind of man but the very words of

qualities [as humility and grandeur] is precisely the key to the age. It is because people like Lancelot Andrewes flourished in the first decade of the seventeenth century – and do not now – that the greatest translation of the Bible could be made then, and cannot now.” Nicolson, 33.

¹⁷⁰ Alexander McClure, *The Translators Revisited*, quoted in Sorenson, 205.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 206.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 208.

¹⁷⁴ “Secretaryship is one of the great shaping forces behind the King James Bible. There is no authorship involved here. Authorship is egotistical, an assumption that you might have something new worth saying. You don’t. Every iota of the Bible counts but without it you count for nothing. The secretary knows that. Like Robert Cecil, he can be clever, canny, resourceful and energetic, but, for all the frustrations, he does not distort the source of his authority. A secretary, whether of God or of king, is in a position of dependent power. He has no authority independent of his master, but he executes that authority without hesitation or compromise. He is nothing without his master but everything through him. Loyalty is power and submission control. For this reason, biblical translation, like royal service, could only be utterly faithful. Without faithfulness, it became meaningless.” Nicolson, 184.

¹⁷⁵ “...Bible translators were generally scrupulous to remain faithful to the words of the original text of the Bible until Dynamic Equivalency became the reigning theory in the middle of the twentieth century.” Ryken, *English*, 46.

¹⁷⁶ Reynolds Price: “The power and memorability of the King James is an almost automatic result of its loyal adherence to principles of literalness and the avoidance of paraphrase.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 127.

¹⁷⁷ “It is clear that the translators of the King James Bible used a formal approach to translation, which required each word of the original to be translated into its closest English equivalent.” McGrath, 250.

¹⁷⁸ “...any translation theory that consistently violates how we deal with literary texts and the discourses of everyday life cannot be the right theory.” Ryken, *English*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ “Translation of ideas or thoughts *rather than words* is a logical fallacy and a linguistic fantasy.” *Ibid.*, 288.

¹⁸⁰ Dynamic equivalence (see footnote 172) is not translation at all but paraphrase. Thus it is rightly called fraud. For an example illustrating this truth, see Appendix A.

God¹⁸² God-breathed,¹⁸³ by every one of which man must live.¹⁸⁴ Mindful of their duty to bring those words to the English reader, they viewed theirs as “a job to be done with immense care and attention to detail.”¹⁸⁵

With what Nicolson calls “passionate exactness”¹⁸⁶ and taking their cue from Tyndale a century before,¹⁸⁷ the translators sought to make the English transparent to the God-breathed Hebrew,¹⁸⁸ Aramaic, and the Greek.¹⁸⁹ In doing so, they transformed English¹⁹⁰ and coincidentally created the richest and most meaningful volume in the English language.¹⁹¹

It can sound strange in the modern ear. It sounded strange to Jacobean ears, insofar as “not much of the material . . . sounded like everyday speech even in the original text.”¹⁹² The reason is it reflected the divine original.¹⁹³ They did not take the Scripture and make it conform to Elizabethan English. They took Elizabethan English and lifted it to the level of the Scripture.

¹⁸¹ “A seismic shift in translation theory and practice occurred in the middle of the twentieth century. Up to that point, most English Bible translations had operated on the premise that the task of English Bible translation was to reproduce the words of the original in the words of the receptor language. Accuracy of translation took precedence over literary style, though compared to modern colloquial translations, it seems from our viewpoint that literary beauty was still accorded a very high position [or was just the natural result of God’s original words with their eloquence and beauty being faithfully translated – Brooks]. Certainly dignity and relative formality of language and syntax prevailed.

“The person who almost single-handedly changed the course of English Bible translation was Eugene Nida, who championed his theory of ‘dynamic equivalence.’ . . . Briefly stated, the theory of dynamic equivalence in Bible translation emphasizes *the reaction of the reader* to the translated text, rather than *the translation of the words and phrases* themselves. In simplest terms, dynamic equivalence is often referred to as ‘thought for thought’ translation as compared to ‘essentially literal’ translation. . . .” Ryken, *English*, 13.

¹⁸² “*The most basic of all literary forms through which meaning is conveyed is words.* There is no such thing as disembodied thought. Thought depends on words, and when we change the words, we change the thought.” Ibid., 31

¹⁸³ As is the meaning of *inspired* in II Timothy 3:16, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

¹⁸⁴ “And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD doth man live.” Deuteronomy 8:3

¹⁸⁵ Nicolson, 72.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 197.

¹⁸⁷ “. . . in arguing that the original Hebrew and Greek syntax have more affinity with native English than with Latin, Tyndale makes the statement that ‘the manner is both one; so that in a thousand places thou needest not but to translate it into the English, word for word.’” Ryken, *English*, 56-57.

¹⁸⁸ What Witherspoon describes as “the childlike piety of the original Hebrew Scriptures, and the vigorous Greek which carried the Christian message of the New Testament.” Witherspoon, 310.

¹⁸⁹ “The English. . . was itself subservient to the original Greek.” Nicolson, 210.

¹⁹⁰ The awkward-sounding these and thous, sayests and givests, may have been ordinary grammar in 1611, “but others are rooted in the commitment of the King James translators to reproduce the original Hebrew and Greek as closely as possible. These are not Renaissance or Elizabethan traits but Hebrew and Greek traits.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 135.

¹⁹¹ The “extraordinary phenomenon of the King James Bible. . . is both clear and rich. It both makes an exact and almost literal translation of the original and infuses that translation with a sense of beauty and ceremony. . . [The translators] enshrined a high moment of Christian meaning” Nicolson, 196.

¹⁹² Ryken, *Legacy*, 134-135.

¹⁹³ “The King James Version. . . owes its merit, not to 17th-century English – which was very difficult – but to its faithful translation of the original. Its style is that of the Hebrew and of the New Testament Greek.” Edward F. Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, 218, quoted by Moorman in *Modern Bibles*, 41.

This English is there to serve the original not to replace it. It speaks in its master's voice and is not the English you would have heard on the street, then or ever. It took up its life in a new and distinct dimension of linguistic space, somewhere between English and Greek (or, for the Old Testament, somewhere between English and Hebrew). These scholars were not pulling the language of the scriptures into the English they knew and used at home. The words of the King James Bible are just as much English pushed towards the condition of a foreign language as a foreign translated into English. It was, in other words, more important to make English godly than to make the words of God into the sort of prose that any Englishman would have written, and that secretarial relationship to the original languages of the scriptures shaped the translation.¹⁹⁴

Their translation technique was literal. It was also conservative.¹⁹⁵ It was conservative in its texts. They rejected corrupted texts. There was no radical effort to seek out divergent texts and overthrow the past.¹⁹⁶ Rather, the translators humbly sought to include the best from previous translations.¹⁹⁷ It was conservative in its texts.

It was conservative in its English. "What virtue was there in newness when the old was so good?"¹⁹⁸ As the preface states, their aim was not to make a new translation "but to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one." There was not some new departure but a "winnowing the best from the past."¹⁹⁹ They knew they stood on the shoulders of those who had gone before: Tyndale (1526),²⁰⁰ Coverdale (1535), and Matthews (1537), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560),²⁰¹ and the Bishop's Bible (1568).²⁰²

The result was what McGrath calls "eloquence by accident."²⁰³ It arises from the accuracy of translation that was the primary goal of the King James Bible. The felicities of thought and expression in the KJV arise from the masterpiece of the divine and glorious originals. That God's Word should be perfect surprises none that know the Lord. That a faithful and accurate

¹⁹⁴ Nicolson, 211.

¹⁹⁵ "The translators were consciously conservative, and frequently introduced archaisms and traditional readings, especially from Tyndale and Coverdale. The resonances of the past were strong in their choices. And perhaps most important of all, they listened to final drafts of the translation being read aloud, verse by verse, in order to assess their rhythm and balance. It is, *par excellence*, a preachers' Bible." Crystal, 64.

¹⁹⁶ "Since the aim of the translation was to conserve what was best in the tradition of English Bible translation, the vocabulary of the King James Bible was just a trifle archaic already when it was published." Ryken, *Legacy*, 56.

¹⁹⁷ The translators showed "exemplary humility" in maintaining "continuity with the mainstream of English Bible translation versus the quest for originality or novelty.... It is a fact that producers of modern dynamic equivalent translations often make disparaging comments about the King James Bible. One might wish for more of the graciousness of the King James translators, as well as their awareness that the grand tradition of English Bible translation is worthy to be perpetuated in many details." *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁹⁸ Nicolson, xiii.

¹⁹⁹ "...they would have been pleased to acknowledge that were winnowing the best from the past." *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ "The sturdy simplicity of Tyndale's diction and the rhythm of his phrases provided the pattern and much of the substance of the 1611 Bible." Witherspoon, 310.

²⁰¹ Bancroft's Translation Rule #14: "These translations to be used when they agree better with the Text than the Bishops' Bible: *Tindoll's, Matthew's, Coverdale's, Whitchurch's, Geneva.*" McGrath, 173, 175.

²⁰² Richard Bancroft's Translation Rule #1: "The ordinary Bible read in the Church, commonly called the *Bishops' Bible*, to be followed, and as little altered as the Truth of the original will permit."

²⁰³ McGrath, 254.

translation should create a glorious English ought surprise none as well. That glorious English is the English of the King James Bible, conservative in texts and conservative in English.

Their translation was also conservative in its diction. Recognizing the timeless majesty of the Word of God, they cast the book in English forms already passing away.²⁰⁴ Their aim was for a timeless and divine tone fitted to the material. Fearing lest they cheapen it, the KJV translators did not frame it in their contemporary English.²⁰⁵

Their translation technique was collegial: they did not work alone but in committees. Out loud, they repeatedly read and re-read. Every man tested²⁰⁶ the work of his fellow.²⁰⁷ This was indeed a “recipe for richness.”

The process fostered humility. It made a sense of shared responsibility and mutual dependence, of cooperation not competition.²⁰⁸ This sense carried through when all was done.²⁰⁹

Their translation technique was regal. They translated for God and king.²¹⁰ Towards James was thankfulness and submission.²¹¹ All the richness that was England,²¹² all the safety that was order, all that was handed down by a great and beneficent God permeated the period and pervaded the wording of the King James. They dedicated the product to the crown. A sense of the august majesty of the monarchy²¹³ imbued the very words with a regal quality.²¹⁴

²⁰⁴ “The King James Bible looks backwards in its grammar, and preserves many of the forms and constructions which were falling out of use elsewhere.” Crystal, 65.

²⁰⁵ “They aimed for a dignified, not a popular style, and often opted for older forms of the language, when modern alternatives were available.” Ibid..

²⁰⁶ *Without counsel purposes are disappointed: but in the multitude of counselors they are established.* Proverbs 15:22.

²⁰⁷ “They so adjusted themselves to each other and to the work as to achieve a unique coordination and balance, functioning thereafter as an organic entity – no mere mechanism equal to the sum of its parts, but a whole greater than all of them.” Gustavus S. Paine, *The Men Behind the King James Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1959), 173.

²⁰⁸ The KJV “exudes, rather, a shared confidence and authority and in that is one of the greatest of all monuments to the suppression of ego.” Nicolson, xii.

²⁰⁹ Not long after its publication, Dr. Richard Kilby, one of the Oxford OT group, “heard a young parson complain in an earnest sermon that a certain passage should read in a way he stated. After the sermon Dr. Kilby took the young man aside and told him that the group had discussed at length not only his proposed reading but thirteen others; only then had they decided on the phrasing as it appeared.” Paine, 137-138.

²¹⁰ “Its method and its voice are...regal.... Its qualities are those of grace, stateliness, scale, power. There is no desire to please here; only a belief in the enormous and overwhelming divine authority.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 153.

²¹¹ “I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.” I Timothy 2:1-4.

²¹² “Their translation was driven by that idea of a constant present, the feeling that the riches, beauties, failings, and sufferings of Jacobean England were part of the same world as the one in which Job, David, or the Evangelists walked. Just as Rembrandt, a few years later, without any sense of absurdity or presumption, could portray himself as the Apostle Paul, the turban wrapped tightly around his greying curls, the eyes intense and inquiring, the King James Translators could write their English words as if the passage of 1,600 or 3,000 years made no difference. Their subject was neither ancient nor modern, but both or either. It was the universal text.” Nicolson, xii.

²¹³ “Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist

Their translation technique was reverent. In the present day, the reverence of some translators for God and the Bible is suspect. The reverence of the KJV translators²¹⁵ is not.²¹⁶ They aimed to please God not man,²¹⁷ the king and not the crowd. Theirs was no commercial venture, no publisher's ploy for the pocketbooks of a target audience. They wrote for Truth itself, and "aiming at truth, they achieved what later generations recognized as beauty and elegance."²¹⁸

There is such a thing as the beauty of holiness, and holiness is separateness. It is the antonym and opposite of the profane, the common and pedestrian. Isaiah was swept from his feet by the holiness of God; the effect of the Bible should be the same. It should leave a man like Daniel, saying, *For how can the servant of this my lord talk with this my lord? for as for me, straightway there remained no strength in me, neither is there breath left in me.*²¹⁹ No other English translation matches the King James for its sense of reverence and holiness.

The timing of the King James translation is the first reason for its tremendous impact. The text used is the second. Third is the target or aim or goal of doing the work. It was three-fold: evangelism of the lost, edification of the saved, and eloquence worthy of the words of God.

First was evangelism: to make the Word of God known to all and "to save all men in our realm whom God will have saved."²²⁰ This was Wycliff's and the martyr Tyndale's, too. Theirs were not commercial motives. They were gospel motives.²²¹ Motive makes a difference.²²²

Evangelism and translation had been an uphill battle in England and in Europe too.²²³ Roman Catholicism did not want the Bible in the hands of the commoners. High Anglicanism did not

shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same." Romans 13:1-3.

²¹⁴ "Its grandeur of phrasing and the deep slow music of its rhythms – far more evident here than in any Bible the sixteenth century had produced – were conscious embodiments of regal glory." Nicolson, xiv.

²¹⁵ "For these Puritans...the words of the scriptures were thought to provide a direct, almost intravenous access to the divine." Ibid., 135.

²¹⁶ "High fidelity reproduction [in translation work] was a moral as well as a technical quality and it was axiomatic that Translators and scholars could approach the text only in a mood of humility and service. 'He who does not believe even one part of it,' Luther had said, 'cannot believe any of it.'" Ibid., 183.

²¹⁷ "In a sense that almost no one now understands, the words of the Bible were the ultimate and encompassing truth itself. That depth of belief in the sufficiency of language is also one of the shaping forces of the King James Bible." Ibid., 182.

²¹⁸ McGrath, 254.

²¹⁹ Daniel 10:17.

²²⁰ From John Purvey's *Prologue to the Wycliffe Bible*, quoted in Ryken, *Legacy*, 23.

²²¹ "The Scriptures make us wise unto salvation (II Timothy 3:15). If we are ignorant, they will instruct us; if out of the way, they will bring us home; if out of order, they will reform us; if in heaviness, comfort us; if dull, quicken us; if cold, inflame us." From the KJV preface, "The Translators to the Reader."

²²² "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." I Cor. 10:31.

²²³ "Lay access to the Bible was about power as much as it was about encouraging personal spirituality. Pressure for the Bible to be placed in the hands of the ordinary person was an implicit demand for the emancipation of the laity from clerical domination." McGrath, 53.

either. The forces of entrenched power, political and religious, did not give way without a fight.²²⁴ But that souls might be saved,²²⁵ they translated.

Beyond evangelism was edification. Saints high and low deserved the milk and meat of the Word.²²⁶ This too was a target of the new translation: to illuminate the minds of believers. As Miles Smith states in the preface, “Translation is that openeth the window, to let in the light; that breaketh the shell, that we may eat the kernel; that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most Holy place; that removeth the cover of the well, that we may come by the water.”²²⁷

For this reason, they avoided the excessive ornamentation highly loved in their day. They obtained a “vividness and experiential quality”²²⁸ by keeping the diction as clear and the vocabulary about as spare as the original.²²⁹ This was the Bible for every man.

For edification, they left the complexities of the original remain, the capacity for layers of meaning. Modern versions offer the reader clarity, but it is an artificial clarity that comes at the expense of something crucial lost: the need to meditate on the words of God and, like David, to ask God to open one’s understanding.²³⁰ Where modern versions promise clarity, they deliver poverty,²³¹ but the KJV is rich in meaning.²³²

²²⁴ English chronicler Henry Knighton notes, “John Wycliffe translated the gospel, which Christ had entrusted to clerics and doctors of the church, so that they might administer it conveniently to the laity, and to lesser people according to the needs of the time and the requirements of their audience, in terms of their hunger of mind. Wycliffe translated it from Latin into the English – not the angelic! – language. As a result, what was previously known only by learned clerics and those of good understanding has become common, and available to the laity – in fact, even to women who can read. As a result, the pearls of the gospel have been scattered and spread before swine.” McGrath, 20.

²²⁵ “And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” II Timothy 3:15.

²²⁶ The Bible “is not only armor but also a whole armory of weapons, both offensive and defensive, with which we may save ourselves and put the enemy to flight. It is not an herb but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for spiritual food and the leaves for healing. It is not a pot of manna or a cruse of oil, which were for memory only, or for a meal or two, but as it were a shower of heavenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it ever so great; and as it were a whole cellar full of oil-filled vessels with which all our necessities may be provided for, and our sin debt paid for. In a word, it is a storehouse of wholesome food against a filthy way of life. It is a physician’s shop, . . . a protection against poisoned heresies. . . . And what an amazing thing is it? The original originated from heaven, not from earth. The Author is God, not man. The writer is the Holy Spirit, not the clever astuteness of the apostles or prophets.” From the KJV preface, “The Translators to the Reader.”

²²⁷ Paine, 173.

²²⁸ Ryken, *Legacy*, 121.

²²⁹ “Whereas Shakespeare racked the lexicon, the King James Bible employs a bare 8000 words – God’s teaching in homely English for everyman.” McCrum, 113.

²³⁰ “Open thou mine eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law.” Psalm 119:18

²³¹ “dynamic equivalent translations have been unable to deliver on their claims to have successfully communicated the meaning of the original.” Ryken, *English*, 17.

²³² “It is the central mechanism of the translation, one of immense lexical subtlety, a deliberate carrying of multiple meanings beneath the surface of a single text. This single rule lies behind the feeling which the King James Bible has always given its readers that the words are somehow extraordinarily freighted, with a richness which few other texts have ever equaled.” Nicolson, 77.

As Miles Smith said in his preface, “The Scripture...is not an herb but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring forth fruit every month, and the fruit thereof is for meat, and the leaves for medicine.... And what marvel? The original thereof being from heaven, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the inditer, the Holy Spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or prophets.”²³³ To this day, the KJV reflects the aim of edification, Wycliffe’s goal “that laypeople might understand the message of the Bible and obey it in their lives, [and] that through it God might ‘grant to us all grace to know well and to keep well holy writ.’”²³⁴

Eloquence was a third aim of the translators, although not as an end in itself.²³⁵ The material warranted the best expression English language could offer. These were God’s words, rendered by order of the king.²³⁶ The result was to be read from pulpits.²³⁷ It would be by countless firesides as well. For that reason, it had to read well. Inherent in the work was a real sense of sound.²³⁸ The goal was rhythmic²³⁹ smoothness and readability, euphony as well as accuracy.²⁴⁰ These were the impassioned words, the Spirit’s words, and sound lends passion to speech. It had to be right. It had to sound right. This was God’s Holy Word.

Of course, eloquence arose with accuracy. The sound echoed the sense, the manner the material. The result created something “indescribably vast and yet perfectly accessible,” a translation that in form as well as words reminds the reader of “a majesty that is mindful of man.”²⁴¹ It is this writer’s conviction that the beauty and power arises from the original.

To the time, text, translators, technique, and target of the work should be added a sixth reason for the impact of the King James Version, one that will be taken up in more detail later in this paper:

²³³ Paine, 173

²³⁴ Ryken, *Legacy*, 23.

²³⁵ “Yet one of the great paradoxes linked to the King James Bible is that it achieved literary excellence precisely by choosing to avoid it. Literary excellence was not even mentioned in the translation criteria set before its seventeenth-century team of translators.” McGrath, 253.

²³⁶ The translators “had a special brief from the Commissioners: they were to go through the text, re-working it so that it would not only read better but *sound* better, a quality for which it became famous throughout the English-speaking world. The translators obviously relished this priority.” McCrum, 112.

²³⁷ Designed for public use and oral reading, the KJV “lent itself to quotation in public discourse” because the “people in the pew heard something authoritative and beautiful....” Ryken, *Legacy*, 60.

²³⁸ “...the draft translation *was read out loud* to the assembled delegates, who were then free to suggest alterations. The King James Bible was designed to be read publicly in church, and there is no doubt that the translators gave careful consideration to ensuring that the translation could be understood by those *to whom it was read*, rather than just those who read it.” McGrath, 187.

²³⁹ “The King James men had ears. As Jacobean they were more sensitive to speech rhythms and more practiced in them, far better trained in rhetoric and respectful of it, than their modern successors.” Quoting Craig Thompson, Ryken, *English*, 260.

²⁴⁰ “The ear is the governing organ of this prose; if it sounds right, it is right. The spoken word is the heard word, and what governs acceptability of a particular verse is not only accuracy but euphony.” Nicolson, 209.

²⁴¹ Speaking of the KJV words of the Psalm 8, Nicolson sees cadence and content in complete tandem: “am absolute simplicity of vocabulary set in a rhythm of the utmost stateliness and majesty. ...The characteristic sound of the King James Bible..., like the ideal of majesty itself, is indescribably vast and yet perfectly accessible, reaching up to the sublime and down to the immediate and the concrete, without any apparent effort. The rhetoric of this translation has, in fact, precisely the qualities which this psalm attributes to God: majesty that is mindful of man.” *Ibid.*, 231.

the intentional dumbing-down of modern translations.²⁴² Modern versions are not written to exalt God but to appeal to the reader. They consciously aim at a target audience with a low reading level, so bringing God down instead of lifting man up. Of the loss of majesty, erosion of dignity, and the insipid and banal qualities of modern translations, Leland Ryken laments that “reading a modern translation...is like walking through a city that has been bombed.”²⁴³

- **How does the impact of the King James Version on the English language compare with the impact of other English versions?**

The impact of the KJV has been far-reaching, long-lasting, and good. The impact of the easy-read modern versions²⁴⁴ has been the opposite in every regard.

Variouly called “insipid and lifeless...flat and lacking in affective power, [with an underlying] sneer factor,”²⁴⁵ none of the modern version appears likely to last as long as the KJV. They are like a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away. They come and go; the KJV remains.

In the just over one hundred years since modern versions began to come out, one after another has been printed, promoted, and discarded. Updated editions follow but fail to get a following. People buy on the publisher’s promise that now they will understand the Bible better than before, but they do not. Meaning is farther beyond reach and richness gone. Like wells without water, modern versions promise refreshment, but when the thirsty come, they find broken cisterns that hold no water. No modern version has supplanted the King James Bible in richness, eloquence, or influence. And certainly, no modern version has benefited mankind as has the King James Bible. Even advocates for modern versions can rally only tepid enthusiasm.

No modern version has taken the KJV’s place in memorization. They are an impediment to it.²⁴⁶ God commands believers to hide His Word in their heart,²⁴⁷ yet the proliferation of varying renderings makes uniform memorization impractical and impossible. Which version is the word of God? How do we know if we memorized it right?

Translated from an unsettled text²⁴⁸ and based on “uncertain textual techniques and unproven spiritual value,”²⁴⁹ no modern version has supplanted the King James Bible in accuracy.²⁵⁰ The

²⁴² “A member of the American Bible Society claimed that the *Good News Bible* was designed for the ‘unsophisticated’ or ‘average’ reader who would be grateful for ‘being delivered from theological subtleties.’” Ryken, *English*, 237.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, 271-272.

²⁴⁴ By *modern* is meant all English translations made since the late Nineteenth Century.

²⁴⁵ Ryken, *Legacy*, 14-15.

²⁴⁶ “Several things have been lost in the change from continuity to innovation. One is the diminishing of literary effect, both because literary values are no longer highly regarded and because to depart from the King James tradition is to depart from the touchstone of literary excellence. We have also lost continuity with the ...literary past as modern translations have drifted from the once-standard King James translation. We have lost a common Bible...a universal biblical ‘language,’ and...we have lost ease of memorization.” Ryken, *English*, 62.

²⁴⁷ “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart.” Deuteronomy 6:6.

²⁴⁸ “We must either believe that overzealous heretics have corrupted the original Word of God or believe that overzealous believers have added to the original Word of God. I can understand why heretics would want to corrupt the original Word of God, but I cannot believe that Christians would add one word to the Word of God

rise of modern versions has been accompanied by a rise in Biblical illiteracy.²⁵¹ Dynamic equivalence *cannot* be accurate.²⁵² It is paraphrase, not translation.²⁵³ Where is the promise of the publishers?²⁵⁴ They have swindled²⁵⁵ a gullible but paying public.²⁵⁶

Modern versions have not aided understanding.²⁵⁷ They have clouded it²⁵⁸ with varying degrees of paraphrase.²⁵⁹ Modern versions have multiplied inaccuracies.²⁶⁰ The smorgasbord approach coupled with the mingling of translation with interpretation²⁶¹ in modern versions moves the “true meaning”²⁶² farther from those seeking it than if they had adapted to the wording of the King James.²⁶³

which they have been entrusted to copy and pass along. The Spirit of God within Christians would put a holy awe and reverence around the sacred word and guided by that same Spirit they would copy what God had given them. My conclusion is that the new Modern Versions are based on Greek manuscripts that have been corrupted by heretics who changed the Word of God to agree with their rejection of the Deity of Christ and their Humanism regarding salvation. The Greek text underlying the King James Version is not filled with additions made by overzealous Christians. It is the Word of God preserved by the Spirit of God and it exalts the Lord Jesus Christ, giving him his proper place and the glory due unto his name.” Freeman, 1-2.

²⁴⁹ Strouse, 121.

²⁵⁰ Although Ryken is definitely not in the MT- TR-camp, he states this: “The question of the accuracy of the King James Bible today is usually answered by looking only at the data [concerning English archaisms – words fallen out of use or having changed meaning]. But quite another verdict surfaces when we place the King James Bible into the context of modern dynamic equivalent translations. Then suddenly the King James Bible zooms up on the scale of accuracy.... The reason for this is that the King James Bible is an essentially literal translation that aims to take the reader straight to what the original authors said. It is transparent to the original text.” Ryken, *Legacy*, 64.

²⁵¹ “The decline in biblical literacy among the church that Lindbeck records coincided with the replacement of the KJV by modern translations.” *Ibid.*, 94.

²⁵² The new translations’ “claim of the translation to be faithful to *the meaning* of the original... was code language for ‘dynamic equivalent rather than literal,’ [arising from] an emphasis on the target audience for which the translation was intended.” Ryken, *English*, 57.

²⁵³ See Appendix A.

²⁵⁴ “Translation should not be the occasion for license. The ordinary rules of textual accuracy, integrity, and reliability should prevail. In fact, I would have thought that the Bible would be the *last* book with which people would take liberties.” Ryken, *English*, 31.

²⁵⁵ “The NIV... was a triumph of modern public relations and marketing strategy....” *Ibid.*, 14-15.

²⁵⁶ “Modern translators do not need to please a monarch but instead a paying public, and they accordingly elevate the interests of the reader to center stage. This is one way among several in which translation of the Bible has become democratized in the modern era.” *Ibid.*, 58.

²⁵⁷ “The English-speaking world has not been brought closer to the ideal translation with the proliferation of modern translations. Readers are less sure than ever of what the original text actually says. Many of these readers carry Bibles that lack dignity and that have reduced the Bible to the level of colloquial discourse. The general tendency has been to demote literary beauty and eloquence. We are not in a golden era of English Bible translation.” *Ibid.*, 63.

²⁵⁸ Leeuwen also “believes that dynamic equivalent translations have ‘made it more difficult for English readers to know what the Bible actually said....’” *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁵⁹ “[D]ynamic equivalent Bibles... arrogate to translation something that should be left to interpretation and commentary. Whenever a translation abandons translation for interpretation and commentary, it impedes a reader’s access to **the actual words** [emphasis mine] of a biblical author.” *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶⁰ “Indeed, the average reader of the English Bible is ignorant of rival translation theories and of how much has been lost and changed from the original text in most modern translations.” *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁶¹ “The process of translation has been used as the occasion to do all sorts of things with the Bible that we would never tolerate with literary documents as they exist in their original or native language. [*italics his*]” *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁶² “Whether or not the King James is an accurate version depends partly on how we define accuracy. If we believe that the standard of accuracy is a translation’s giving us the words of the original text in equivalent English words, then the KJV shows its superior accuracy over modern dynamic equivalent translations on virtually every

Modern versions have not made believers content.²⁶⁴ They have fostered restlessness,²⁶⁵ a silly looking-for of some thing new.²⁶⁶ ²⁶⁷ Rejecting the new, God's people should say of the King James, "The old is better."²⁶⁸

The impact of the new versions has not been long-lasting. They come and go with dreary regularity. It has not been far-reaching. They make a flurry when they first come out and are soon forgotten. The underlying text is unsettled. The current translation is unsettled. The sheep of God are unsettled. They confuse memorization, cloud doctrine, create restlessness, and give silly people the impression that the next version the publisher issues will be easy to read and understand. But they miss the meaning.

They throw into question the validity of texts.²⁶⁹ They throw into doubt the exact words of God. They have brought the Holy Bible down to the level of the latest best-seller. To the British poet T. S. Eliot, "modern Bible translations are 'an active agent of decadence.'"²⁷⁰ Their "breezy

page of the Bible (and probably multiple times on every page)." This is pretty strong commendation from a helper of the TEV committee! Ryken, *Legacy*, 66.

²⁶³ Although he cannot bring himself to advocate a return to the KJV and wishes for a modern version to take its place, Leland Ryken admits that "Claims by modern translators and Bible scholars that the Christian public is fortunate to have been delivered from the archaisms...of the KJV turn out to be hollow. If Bible knowledge in our day has declined across the board, where is the alleged gain from modern translations? The very proliferation of translations has discouraged the Christian public from seeking to know what the Bible actually says....Readers of the KJV through the centuries did not struggle with its language, just as modern readers who never relinquished the KJV manage just fine with it. Are we better off today without the KJV than Christendom was for three centuries? No: those eras had many advantages over us. Although we cannot turn back the clock, we should lament what has been lost, not claim an illusory superiority." *Ibid.*, 230-231.

²⁶⁴ "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee." Hebrews 13:5.

²⁶⁵ The multiplicity of modern translations "reflects an ongoing discontent with any single Bible that English-speaking readers have available to them. With the lack of consensus goes a degree of uncertainty and potential confusion. The acceleration of translations during the past four decades doubtless signals a restlessness and quest for novelty." Ryken, *English*, 55.

²⁶⁶ Even though he advocates for the new translations which to many increasingly demonstrate their market-driven motives, James white says "Change, for the sake of change, is not a Christian virtue. Such an attitude comes from Madison Avenue, not the Scriptures. There is nothing good about being quick to grab at the newest thing that comes down the road. Contentment with God's gifts and provisions is indeed a rare possession of Christians today." James R. White, *The King James Only Controversy* (Minneapolis, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 1995), 9.

²⁶⁷ Concerning translation theory, "The whole climate changed around 1970. To understand which way the wind was now blowing, all we need to do is look at the names of versions as they appeared.... The fashionable term is now *new*." Ryken, *English*, 61.

²⁶⁸ "It is not too much to say that the English Bible had become so familiar to English-speaking Christians (and even cultured non-Christians) that it never seemed foreign until a steady diet of dynamic equivalence translations weaned readers away from the King James tradition." *Ibid.*, 14.

²⁶⁹ "By claiming the presence of errors in the preserved Hebrew text of the Old Testament, Fundamentalists have rejected the testimony of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christ, through repeated use of *it is written* concerning His copy of the Hebrew Old Testament, testified that His Old Testament had the same words as the *autographa*. Furthermore, He, through promises and statements, also testified that these very words will continue through the ages (Matthew 5:18; 24:35, Luke 16:17; John 10:35)." Chester W. Kulus, *Those So-Called Errors* (Newington, CT: Emmanuel Baptist Theological Press, 2003), 369.

²⁷⁰ Ryken, *Legacy*, 166.

familiarity” brings the sacred down to the banal.²⁷¹ Ryken has said, “A Bible translation that sounds like the daily newspaper is given the same level of attention and credence as the daily newspaper.”²⁷² And it changes a man about as much.²⁷³

The new translations are dumbed-down.²⁷⁴ They are purposely written for a target audience like fashions designed for a target market. Modern, marketed translations work toward flattening the style and “stepping down the exaltation of passages that in the original are elevated and that sweep us upward with their sheer exhilaration.”²⁷⁵ In every area of importance, modern English versions are only a cheap imitation of the Bible. They cannot stand up to the KJV.

They have succeeded in one area, however, and that is the “...piece by piece destruction of the Word of God.”²⁷⁶ They have by their very number, variety, and mangling of meaning,²⁷⁷ firmly planted in the minds of millions doubt as to what are the words of God. Thanks to the multiplicity of versions since 1900, the minds of many are mesmerized with the faith-destroying question, “Yea, hath God said?”²⁷⁸

- **Where do we go from here?**

What should the godly do? They should keep²⁷⁹ the King James.²⁸⁰ It is the finest work of literature in the English language. It transformed the English language. It took English and

²⁷¹ Leland Ryken, no King James advocate, catalogs the detrimental effects of modern versions as reduced richness of the text, reduced expectations of Bible readers, diminished respect for the Biblical authors (by the “what Paul was trying to say” fallacy [as though Paul did not know how to say it]), reduced authority of the Bible, impoverishment of language, emaciated theology, a one-dimensional Bible with loss of thought-provoking ambiguities, greater skepticism that any translation is worthy of trust, and lowered literary standards.” Ryken, *English*, 199-211.

²⁷² Ryken, *Legacy*, 156.

²⁷³ Concerning poor translation work as in the *New English Bible*, Nicolson states, “The flattening of language is a flattening of meaning. Language which is not taut with a sense of its own importance, which is apologetic in its desire to be acceptable to a modern consciousness, language in other words which submits to its audience, rather than instructing, informing, moving, challenging and even entertaining them, is no longer a language which can carry the freight the Bible requires. It has, in short, lost all authority. The language of the King James Bible is the language...of patriarchy, of an instructed order, of richness as a form of beauty, of authority as a form of good; the New English Bible is motivated by the opposite, an anxiety not to bore or intimidate. It is driven, in other words, by the desire to please and, in that way, is a form of language which has died.” Nicolson, 153-154.

²⁷⁴ The NIV “...regularly moves beyond what the original text says to the interpretation preferred by the translators. Readability was a high priority, and one tabulation considers its reading level at the seventh grade level.” Ryken, *English*, 53-54.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 213.

²⁷⁶ Freeman, 1.

²⁷⁷ “...no one has produced editions of the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts that alter the texts in the ways that many modern translations have done.” Ryken, *English*, 30.

²⁷⁸ “Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said...” Genesis 3:1a.

²⁷⁹ “English Bible translation has lost its way in the past half century. We are farther from having a reliable and stable text than ever before. The only Bible reader who is not perplexed is the one who sticks with just one version and does not inquire more broadly into what is going on.” Ryken, *English*, 293.

²⁸⁰ “The unsettled text of the CT and the uncertain translational techniques of the modern versions should be sufficient cautions to the fundamentalist about moving away from the certainty of the standard, received, and authorized Bible.” Strouse, 121.

exalted it and is the greatest uplifting force for the English mind. The KJV is a reverent, eloquent, and accurate rendering of the words of God in English. It is God's Word in English.²⁸¹ The times²⁸² and talented men involved in its translation will never come again.²⁸³ It is impossible to see²⁸⁴ how it can ever be surpassed.²⁸⁵ Other peoples may yet receive the Scriptures in their native tongues, but let not English speakers forfeit what is lasting and nourishing for what is transitory and without substance.

If people find the KJV awkward, teach them up to it.²⁸⁶ Don't dumb it down; "smart them up." Bring the people up to the Bible;²⁸⁷ do not bring the Bible down to the people.²⁸⁸ Do not insult

²⁸¹ Non-KJV advocates grudgingly admit that "Even in the closing decades of the twentieth century, American Christianity continued its love affair with this translation. . . . A series of polemical works argued that the King James Bible alone represented the authentic 'Word of God' . . . [T]hese views. . . remain an important witness to the continuing respect and admiration in which the King James Bible is widely held." McGrath, 299.

²⁸² Speaking circa 1856, Bishop Middleton asserted, "The style of our present version is incomparably superior to anything which might be expected from the financial and perverted taste of our own age." Paisley, 67.

²⁸³ "It happens in linguistic history that languages lose aspects of themselves, whole wings of their existence withering, falling off, disappearing into the past. Has it now happened to English? Does English no longer have a faculty of religious language?" Nicolson, 236.

²⁸⁴ "It is not impossible that in the providence of God another universally accepted standard translation could be produced. However, given the lateness of the hour, the lack of spiritual scholarship, and the fact that our language no longer has the depth and vitality it once had, this seems most unlikely. All indications point to the KJV as the Bible God would have His people use in these last days before the Second Coming of Christ. God has preserved in the King James Version His original work of inspiration. The flower has not faded! The sword is as sharp as the day in which it was first whetted!" Moorman, *Modern Bibles*, 48.

²⁸⁵ Most defenders of the KJV "have been ignored or dismissed as right-wing extremists. However, the evidence uncovered by them has not and will not go away. Fundamentalists are going to have to confront the extensive evidence of apostasy associated with the critical text from Origen to Metzger. If separation is an inviolable foundation of Fundamentalism, Fundamentalists are going to have to admit the apostasy connected with the critical text." Sorenson, 216.

²⁸⁶ Ryken admits that archaic King James forms are such that "the meaning is clear for anyone who makes an honest attempt to get beyond inflected verbs. . . a modern reader can be educated into what the words meant. . ." Ryken, *Legacy*, 63.

²⁸⁷ "In the Bible, as in everyday life, people generally rise to the level of formality that an occasion requires." *Ibid.*, 133.

²⁸⁸ Concerning ambiguities in the Bible, Van Leeuwen says, "biblical metaphors drop into our hearts like a seed in soil and make us think, precisely because they are not obvious at first. . . . It is the foreignness of metaphors that is their virtue. Metaphors make us stop and think, *Now what does that mean?* . . . The translator who removes biblical metaphors to make the text 'easier' for readers may defeat the purpose of the Holy Spirit, who chose a metaphor in the first place. Metaphors grab us and work on us and in us. They have the spiritual power to transform our minds." Ryken, *English*, 248, 255.

the reader by assuming he hasn't the interest or the capacity to adapt himself to the KJV.²⁸⁹ Expect the readers to rise!²⁹⁰ Shouldn't the Bible make them do that?²⁹¹

Twenty-First Century people should be capable of learning to read what their Seventeenth-Century forebears could!²⁹² If they find it difficult, explain it to them. Show them how the *thees* and *thous* have great meaning and the *-eths* and *saiths* sound doctrine. The very forms that shallow-minded moderns find off-putting are, when explained patiently and properly, sources of tremendous clarity and truth.

The Word of God should be above us. God is above us. His thoughts expressed in His words are above us.²⁹³ To take them and put them in the language of the man on the street, something that was not done by the Hebrew writers, the Greek writers, or the King James translators, is to make the sacred profane. It is to humanize the divine. It cannot have the blessing of God. Jesus is not in it, without whom His disciples can do nothing.

In the days of the last kings of Judah, God's people committed two evils. They were foolish things and they brought the judgment of God. One man stood against the people and told them the word of the Lord. His name was Jeremiah. He said this:

*For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.*²⁹⁴

²⁸⁹ This could be called the "They're going to do it anyway" argument, similar to the world's outcry for "safe sex" is based on the assumption that people will fornicate no matter what. One of the most flagrant proponents of this pathetic and damaging approach concerning translations is D.A. Carson: "If the spiritual leaders [of a church] endorse only the KJV, and either ban everything else or ignore all the other versions in the hope that they will go away, those leaders may rest assured that the younger believers will find their own modern versions. Regrettably, lacking the knowledge that could have promoted the NIV or the NASB, this younger generation will probably opt for the LB. Thus even where a senior saint has a deep emotional commitment to the KJV, he will probably be wise to make himself familiar with the best of the modern versions and to be prepared to recommend one of them to others who may not share his commitment to the KJV." D.A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1979), 101.

²⁹⁰ "We need to scrutinize...[the] formulation [that] American people cannot handle theological subtlety and exaltation of language, [that] God did not communicate his truth in elevated language, and [that] the theology of the Bible does not require sophistication of thought and language. Furthermore, if an English translation consistently chooses a possible interpretation from among available options, we end up not with a reliable text but with a text of possible interpretations – a hypothetical text based on what a given translation committee decided to dole out to its readers from among available options." Ryken, *English*, 237.

²⁹¹ "Should we not expect readers to muster the same level of rigor for the Bible that they are expected to summon in high school and college literature courses?" *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁹² "It is, of course, ironic that the common reader through the centuries was regarded as capable of rising to the demands of the King James Version, while modern readers, with more formal education than their forbears, are assumed to have ever-decreasing ability to read." One of the translators of the NEB said in a televised interview that "the new Bible was intended...for people who do not go to church...for a rising generation less well educated than formerly in classical and literary traditions." *Ibid.*, 200.

²⁹³ "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9.

²⁹⁴ Jeremiah 2:13.

In like manner those who forsake the greatest work of literature in the English language, the only eloquent and accurate English work of divine literature, the King James Bible, commit two evils. They forsake the translation that lifted the cover from the well. They lay instead upon it a stone so weighty not even a Jacob could roll it off²⁹⁵ and now none can come by the water. They have gone after tampered texts and paraphrases, broken cisterns that hold no water.

When a new translation uplifts my soul, edifies my mind, ravishes my heart, and drives me to my knees, being a faithful rendering of the original, I may consider reading it. There has not yet come one. I love the King James Bible. It brought me to the Savior. It saved my soul and gave me back my mind. On his death bed, my father turned to me and asked, "How did I miss the New Testament?" It was after I had been reading to him the King James Version.

It is my position that the attitude of every believer ought not to be, "Why use the King James?" but "Why go with anything else?"

Last eve I paused beside the blacksmith's door,
And heard the anvil ring the vesper chime;
Then looking in, I saw upon the floor,
Old hammers, worn with beating years of time.

"How many anvils have you had," said I
"To wear and batter all these hammers so?"
"Just one," said he, and then with twinkling eye,
"The anvil wears the hammers out, you know."

"And so," I thought, "The anvil of God's Word
For ages skeptic blows have beat upon,
Yet, though the noise of falling blows was heard,
The Anvil is unharmed, the hammers gone."

- John Clifford

²⁹⁵ Genesis 29:8-10.

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Appendix A

Literature is what the author says. Paraphrase tells us what the author means. The two are not the same. To illustrate that dynamic equivalence (“what the author means” paraphrase) is fraudulent because it is not translation, here are some examples of dynamic equivalence applied to other texts. I think we would agree that if this is what dynamic equivalence does, “translation in the last half century has taken liberties with the biblical text that would be rejected out of hand in the ordinary world of reading and writing.”²⁹⁶

Example I

Original: “Death, be not proud, though some have called
Thee mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so.”
- John Donne (1773-1631)

“Dynamic equivalent” (“what he means”) translation:

“Don’t be proud, death. You’re not as great as some people think you are.”²⁹⁷

Which is better? Which is more beautiful? Which is in the author’s own words?

Example II

Original:

That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruin'd choirs, where late the sweet birds sang.
In me thou seest the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west,
Which by and by black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me thou see'st the glowing of such fire
That on the ashes of his youth doth lie,
As the death-bed whereon it must expire
Consumed with that which it was nourish'd by.
This thou perceivest, which makes thy love more strong,
To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
- Sonnet 73, William Shakespeare

“Dynamic equivalent” (thought-for-thought) translation:

“I’m getting’ old, Honey. You won’t have me around much longer. I guess you can see it to look at me, and I am glad it makes you love me more, since my time is short.”

Which is better? Which is more beautiful? Which is in the author’s own words?

²⁹⁶ Ryken, *English*, 23.

²⁹⁷ Ryken, *English*, 27.

Example III

Original: “A thing of beauty is a joy forever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing.”
- from *Endymion*, John Keats (1795-1821)

“Dynamic equivalent” (“what he means”) translation:

“We enjoy a beautiful thing for a long, long time. It just gets better and better. We never really forget it. Remembering it calms us down and makes us feel comfortable.”

Which is better? Which is more beautiful? Which is in the author’s own words?

Example IV

Original: “Whose woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though.
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.”
- from *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*, Robert Frost (1874-1963)

“Dynamic equivalent” (thought-for-thought) translation:

“I’m pretty sure I know who owns this property and he doesn’t live near here. He lives in town. He can’t see me stop to watch the snow fall on his trees.”

Which is better? Which is more beautiful? Which is in the author’s own words?

Example V

Original: “Hope is the thing with feathers
That perches in the soul,
And sings the tune without the words
And never stops at all.”
- from *Hope is the Thing With Feathers*, Emily Dickinson (1830-1886)

“Dynamic equivalent” (thought-for-thought) translation:

“Hope is a little thing inside me that keeps me happy all the time.”

Which is better? Which is more beautiful? Which is in the author’s own words?

Appendix B

A very few of the many expressions that have come into common usage from the KJV:²⁹⁸

Expression:	Source:
By the skin of your teeth	Job 19:20
Handwriting on the wall	Daniel 5:5
Am I my brother's keeper?	Genesis 4:9
A little birdie told me so	Ecclesiastes 10:20
At my wit's end	Psalms 107:27
Brought down the house	Judges 16:30
Can't get blood from a turnip	Genesis 4 (Cain's bloodless offering)
Drop in the bucket	Isaiah 40:15
Can the leopard change his spots?	Jeremiah 13:23
Know-it-all	I John 2:20

“A man cannot claim to be educated and not know its contents and cannot claim to be saved and deny its truths.”²⁹⁹

Appendix C

Three passages showing how tampered texts and poor translation technique completely alter the Bible and affect key doctrines:

Passage #1: I Timothy 3:16

Original (TR):¹⁶ καὶ ὁμολογουμένως μέγα ἐστὶ τὸ τῆς εὐσεβείας μυστήριον· Θεὸς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

KJV: I Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

NASV: I Timothy 3:16 And by common confession great is the mystery of godliness:

He who was revealed in the flesh,
Was vindicated in the Spirit,
Beheld by angels,
Proclaimed among the nations,
Believed on in the world,
Taken up in glory.

²⁹⁸ Taken from Rockwell, 12

²⁹⁹ Librarian's choice, anon., *Unpub word*, 13

NIV: I Timothy 3:16 Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:
He appeared in a body,
was vindicated by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was preached among the nations,
was believed on in the world,
was taken up into glory.

NEB: I Timothy 3:16 And great beyond question is the mystery of our religion:
He who was manifested in the body,
vindicated in the spirit,
seen by angels,
who was proclaimed among the nations,
believed in throughout the world,
glorified in high heaven. I Timothy 3:16

NWT: I Timothy 3:16 Indeed, the sacred secret of this godly devotion is admittedly great: 'He was made manifest in the flesh, was declared righteous in spirit, appeared to angels, was preached about among nations, was believed upon in [the] world, was received up in glory.'

Passage #2: I John 5:6-8

Original (TR): ⁶ οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ ἐλθὼν δι' ὕδατος καὶ αἵματος, Ἰησοῦς ὁ Χριστός· οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὕδατι μόνον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῷ ὕδατι καὶ τῷ αἵματι καὶ τὸ Πνεῦμά ἐστι τὸ μαρτυροῦν, ὅτι τὸ Πνεῦμά ἐστιν ἡ ἀλήθεια. ⁷ ὅτι τρεῖς εἰσιν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῷ οὐρανῷ, ὁ πατήρ, ὁ λόγος, καὶ τὸ Ἅγιον Πνεῦμα· καὶ οὗτοι οἱ τρεῖς ἓν εἰσι. ⁸ καὶ τρεῖς εἰσὶν οἱ μαρτυροῦντες ἐν τῇ γῆ, τὸ Πνεῦμα, καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ, καὶ τὸ αἷμα· καὶ οἱ τρεῖς εἰς τὸ ἓν εἰσιν.

KJV: I John 5:6 This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.
7 For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost: and these three are one.
8 And there are three that bear witness in earth, the Spirit, and the water, and the blood: and these three agree in one.

NASV: I John 5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with water only, but with the water and with the blood.
7 And it is the Spirit who bears witness, because the spirit is the truth.
8 For there are three that bear witness, the Spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.

NIV: I John 5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood – Jesus Christ. He did not come by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit who testifies, because the Spirit is the truth.
7 For there are three that testify:
8 the Spirit, the water and the blood; and the three are in agreement.”

NEB: I John 5:6 This is he who came with water and blood: Jesus Christ. He came, not by water alone, but by water and blood; and there is the Spirit to bear witness, because the Spirit is truth.
7, 8 For there are three witnesses, the Spirit, the water, and the blood, and these three are in agreement.

NWT: I John 5:6 This is he that came by means of water and blood, Jesus Christ; not with the water only, but with the water and with the blood. And the spirit is that which is bearing witness, because the spirit is the truth.

7 For there are three witness bearers,

8 the spirit and the water and the blood, and the three are in agreement.

Passage #3: Acts 8:36-38

Original (TR): ὡς δὲ ἐπορεύοντο κατὰ τὴν ὁδόν, ἦλθον ἐπὶ τι ὕδωρ· καὶ φησιν ὁ εὐνοῦχος, Ἰδοῦ, ὕδωρ· τί κωλύει με βαπτισθῆναι; ³⁷ εἶπε δὲ ὁ Φίλιππος, Εἰ πιστεύεις ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας, ἔξεστιν. ἀποκριθεὶς δὲ εἶπε, Πιστεύω τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἶναι τὸν Ἰησοῦν Χριστόν. ³⁸ καὶ ἐκέλευσε στήναι τὸ ἄρμα· καὶ κατέβησαν ἀμφότεροι εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ, ὃ τε Φίλιππος καὶ ὁ εὐνοῦχος· καὶ ἐβάπτισεν αὐτόν.

KJV: Acts 8:36 And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized?

37 And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

38 And he commanded the chariot to stand still: and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

NASV: Acts 8:36“And as they went along the road they came to some water; and the eunuch said, “Look! Water! What prevents me from being baptized?”

37 [And Philip said, “If you believe with all your heart, you may.” And he answered and said, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.”]

38 And he ordered the chariot to stop, and they both went down into the water, Philip as well as the eunuch, and he baptized him.”

NIV: Acts 8:36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, “Look, here is water. Why shouldn’t I be baptized?”

(The NIV has no 37, not even the number).

38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him.

NEB: Acts 8:36 As they were going along the road, they came to some water. ‘Look,’ said the eunuch, ‘here is water: what is there to prevent my being baptized?’;

(The NEB has no 37, not even the number).

38 and he ordered the carriage to stop. Then they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

NWT: Acts 8:36 Now as they were going over the road, they came to a certain body of water, and the eunuch said: “Look! A body of water; what prevents me from getting baptized?”

37-----

38 With that he commanded the chariot to halt, and they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him.

Appendix D

A partial list of cultural forces that paved the way for the triumph of dynamic equivalent Bibles in the 1970s include these:³⁰⁰

- an antiestablishment and antitraditional spirit that welcomed translations that seemed novel and modern (an unconventional Bible was automatically preferred to a traditional one among many evangelicals);
- a loss of appreciation for, or even ability to recognize, literary excellence;
- a new preference for colloquialism over formality in written discourse (perhaps an outgrowth of literary realism);
- evangelistic zeal, accompanied by a pragmatic outlook that endorsed whatever religious materials produced the most conversions;
- a consumer-oriented and Gallup poll mentality that led translators and publishers to give readers what they wanted (the ‘target audience’ mentality);
- a general laziness that has increasingly resulted in an obsession with making virtually all pursuits, including Bible reading, easy;
- new marketing techniques that could appeal to target markets (and that could eventually package ‘niche Bibles’ for specific groups);
- a narcissistic cultural orientation that elevated the reader rather than the author or text to center stage in the reading process (in dynamic equivalence theory, the reader reigns, a view that came into vogue simultaneously with the triumph of reader-response literary theory).

³⁰⁰ Ryken, *English*, 15.