

PREFACE

The impetus for the King James, or Authorized, version of the Bible is well known. At the Hampton Court Conference in January of 1604, the Puritan Dr. John Rainolds, president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, proposed that a new translation of the Bible be undertaken. According to Bishop William Barlow's account: "After that he [Rainolds] moved his majesty that there might be a new translation of the Bible, because those which were allowed in the reign of king Henry the Eight and Edward the Sixt were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the original."

Three examples were then given by Rainolds: "First, Galatians iv. 25. The Greek word συστίχει is not well translated as now it is, *bordereth*, neither expressing the force of the word, nor the apostles sense, nor the situation of the place. Secondly, psalm cv. 28, 'They were not obedient;' the original being, 'They were not disobedient.' Thirdly, psalm cvi. 30, 'Then stood up Phinees and prayed,' the Hebrew hath, 'executed judgment.'"

Of the three Bibles "allowed" in the reign of Henry VIII and Edward VI (the Bibles of Coverdale, Matthew, and the Great Bible), only the Great Bible contained all three of the errors mentioned by Rainolds. He ignored the Bishops' Bible of Queen Elizabeth's reign (which, in its translation of the Psalms, corrected the sense in two of the readings), and gave as revision suggestions the exact readings of the Geneva Bible. But then the king rejoined that "he could never yet see a Bible well translated into English; but I think, that of all, that of Geneva is the worst." And so was authorized "one uniform translation" to be "done by the best learned in both the universities; after them to be reviewed by the bishops, and the chief learned of the church; from them to be presented to the privy council; and lastly, to be ratified by his royal authority."

In July of 1604, King James could write to Bishop Richard Bancroft, the "chiefe overseer" of the work, that he had "appointed certain learned men, to the number of four and fifty, for the translating of the Bible." Fifteen general rules were given for the guidance of the translators. The first rule stated that they were to follow the Bishops' Bible: "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." Accordingly, the king's printer, Robert Barker, supplied forty unbound copies of the Bishops' Bible to the translators. Rule fourteen further specified: "These translations to be used, when they agree better with the text than the Bishops' Bible, viz. Tindall's. Cover-

dale's. Whitchurch's. Geneva."

Thus, the translators' preface to the King James Bible, "The Translators to the Reader," states:

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

Throughout their preface, the translators acknowledged their dependence on the earlier English versions:

And to the same effect say wee, that we are so farre off from condemning any of their labours that trauailed before vs in this kinde, either in this land or beyond sea, either in King *Henries* time, or King *Edwards* (if there were any translation, or correction of a translation in his time) or Queene *Elizabeths* of euer-renoumed memorie, that we acknowledge them to have beene raised up of God, for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserue to be had of vs and of posteritie in euerlasting remembrance.

For by this meanes it commeth to passe, that whatsoeuer is sound alreadie (and all is sound for substance, in one or other of our editions, and the worst of ours farre better then their autentike vulgar) the same will shine as gold more brightly, being rubbed and polished; also, if any thing be halting, or superfluous, or not so agreeable to the originall, the same may bee corrected, and the trueth set in place.

Yet for all that, as nothing is begun and perfittid at the same time, and the latter thoughts are thought to be the wiser: so, if we building vpon their foundation that went before vs, and being holpen by their labours, doe endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us; they, we perswade our selues, if they were aliue, would thanke vs.

This does not mean that the King James Bible was not also based on the original languages. As the translators' preface says: "If you aske what they had before them, truly it was the *Hebrew* text of the Olde Testament, the *Greeke* of the New. These are the two golden pipes, or rather conduits, where-through the oulie branches emptie themselues into the golde." And as the preface also states: "Neither did wee thinke much to consult the Translators or Commentators, *Chaldee*, *Hebrewe*, *Syrian*, *Greeke* or *Latine*, no nor the *Spanish*, *French*, *Italian*, or *Dutch*." The King James translators were some of the greatest linguistic minds that ever lived. So, as the title page reads:

THE HOLY BIBLE, Conteyning the Old Testament, *AND THE NEW: Newly Translated out of the Originall tongues: & with the former Translations diligently compared and reuised, by his Maiesties spe- ciall Comandement. Appointed to be read in Churches. Imprinted at London by Robert Barker, Printer to the Kings most Excellent Maies- tie.* ANNO DOM. 1611.

The Authorized Version was both a *revision* of the earlier English Bibles and a *translation* from the original languages, all based on the Bishops' Bible.

The immediate concern of this book, then, is why the Bishops' Bible, and the extent to which the King James Bible is indebted to it. And secondarily, the degree to which the King James Bible relies on the earlier English translations mentioned in the fourteenth rule given to its translators, other possible sources that might have influenced the translators, and evidence of the translators at work as they transformed the Bishops' Bible of 1602 into the Authorized Version of 1611.