

The King James Bible and Biblical Scholarship (The Ethel Wood Lecture, 2011)

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The web-site describing the Ethel Wood Lectures tells us that Mrs. Wood's bequest to the University of London (1970) was "to provide for an annual lecture on the English Bible." In looking over the list of lectures given since then, it appears that this has been interpreted with impressive flexibility. My own invitation to deliver the lecture for 2011, however, came with a specific request that I link it in some way to the 400th anniversary of the publication of the "King James Version" of the Bible, AKA the "Authorised Version" (hereafter KJV). But because the limits of my own scholarly competence do not include the 16th and 17th centuries, I cannot consider offering any fresh contribution on the circumstances or production of the KJV, nor on its literary qualities and influence.¹ So I have chosen to consider the KJV in relationship to my own field of biblical scholarship, and under three main headings: (1) the KJV as a product of the biblical scholarship of its day, (2) the contribution of the KJV to the further development of biblical scholarship in the period after its publication, and (3) the effects of biblical scholarship upon our estimation of the KJV today.

I

The KJV is largely thought of today either simply as the sacred text above all (indeed, in some ultra-conservative circles of readers, as the *very inspired Word of God* and of miraculous quality), or as one of the greatest (if not the single greatest) and most influential literary productions in the English language. A large number of other English translations of the Bible are available now, of course, many of them having appeared in the last century or so; but the KJV remains impressively popular among those who read the Bible as scripture, and also, notably, those who treat it simply as historic English literature.² As David Daniell observed in his massive study, *The Bible in English*, "On a historical scale, the sheer longevity of this version is a phenomenon, without parallel."³

Surely, a major reason for the success of the KJV lay in the scholarly abilities of those assigned with the task of preparing it. There were certainly also political and commercial motives and moves involved as well in its early success, and the KJV received "a barrage of criticism" from clergy and scholars in the first 150 years or so

¹ Cf., e.g., the 1950 Ethel M. Wood Lecture by C. S. Lewis, *The Literary Impact of the Authorised Version* (London: Athlone Press, 1950). It is difficult, however, to find much in Lewis' obviously learned and wide-ranging discussion that corresponds directly to the lecture's title! Some years ago I was involved in a somewhat wider project as Associate Editor: David L. Jeffrey (Gen. Ed.), *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992).

² T. H. Darlow and H. F. Moule, rev. A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of the Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525-1961* (London: British & Foreign Bible Society, 1968); William J. Chamberlin, *Catalogue of English Bible Translations: A Classified Bibliography of Versions and Editions including books, Parts, and Old and New Testament Apocrypha and Apocryphal Books* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1991). David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2003), 134, refers to "about nine hundred fresh translations" of the whole Bible or New Testament made since 1526 (i.e., since Tyndale's New Testament).

³ Daniell, 427. I am particularly dependent on Daniell's work (esp. 427-60) in discussing the background and setting for the production of the KJV.

after its appearance.⁴ But, undeniably, the KJV was the product of biblical scholars and scholarship of its time. Of the forty-seven known members of the six translation-companies (two each in Oxford, Cambridge and Westminster), most were fellows of Oxford or Cambridge colleges, including the Regius Professors of Hebrew and Greek in both universities.⁵

Moreover, some of these figures are particularly impressive, perhaps none more so than Lancelot Andrewes (1555-1626, Fellow of Pembroke Hall, Cambridge), reputed to have been competent in fifteen languages, whose many published sermons and devotional pieces exhibit his intelligence and stylistic abilities.⁶ Among those appointed to produce the KJV, competence was needed in Greek for the NT, although the available editions were all based on late manuscripts (a matter to which I return later in this lecture). For the Old Testament, the Hebrew Massoretic Text had to be consulted, for the Apocrypha the Greek Septuagint, except for 2 Esdras, for which the Latin served.⁷ Wisely, however, those commissioned for the work included men with expertise in the various ancient languages *and also* with a keen sense of how the English language could be used effectively to combine simplicity and elegance with accuracy in translation.⁸

However, the KJV was not a *de novo* translation made simply from original-language texts, nor was it intended to be one. Instead, as stated in one of the fifteen *Rules to be observed in the Translation of the Bible* given to the members of the translation team, “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.” Another of the rules, however, allowed “These translations to be used when they agree better with the Text [i.e., the respective original language text] than [does] the Bishops: *Tindoll’s, Matthews, Coverdale’s, Whitchurch’s, Geneva.*”⁹ It was, in short, to be a learned and well-done *revision* of the Bishops’ Bible (1568), but a revision based particularly upon consultation of original-language texts (and also the Latin Vulgate) as well as other key predecessor English Bibles.¹⁰

⁴ Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 429. For his discussion of those political and commercial factors, see pp. 451-60.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 436. Daniell cites Richard Bancroft (Bishop of London) as referring to the royal approval of a list of fifty-four translators, but then notes that “the best accounts” list only forty-seven scholars.

⁶ T.S. Eliot praised Andrewes abilities in English style and theology in *For Lancelot Andrewes: Essays on Style and Order* (London: Faber & Gwyer, 1928).

⁷ Still the most important resource on the base-texts of the KJV is F. H. A. Scrivener, *The Authorized Edition of the English Bible (1611), Its Subsequent Reprints and Modern Representatives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1884), esp. 40-60 and 243-63.

⁸ Daniell (*The Bible in English*, 436-38) mentions some of the noteworthy members of the group, and also certain curious omissions of obviously competent scholars. For more extended discussion of the translation team, see Olga S. Opfell, *The King James Bible Translators* (Jefferson, NC/London: McFarland, 1982).

⁹ As given by Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 439, citing from A. W. Pollard (ed.), *Records of the English Bible: The Documents Relating to the Translation and Publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1911), 53-55, added wording in square brackets mine for clarity. “Whitchurch’s” refers to the Protestant printer, Edward Whitchurch, who was involved in producing several English Bibles, including Matthew’s Bible and the Great Bible. See, F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone (eds.) *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, Revised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), s.v.

¹⁰ Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 440-42, in a section entitled “Revision, Not Fresh Translation,” posited that after the Hampton Court meeting where the idea of a new translation had been given royal approval, “the enterprise had changed, for reasons that are not known,” and instead those appointed were “to make a revision, but of the Bishops’ Bible,” which Daniell regarded as “regrettable, but

In light of this aim and the evident success of the KJV, we can view it as in its time the culmination and beneficiary of a series of prior English translations of the Bible that went back at least to Tyndale's influential translation of the New Testament (1526).¹¹ Indeed, though the KJV was explicitly to be a revision of the Bishops' Bible, it has been calculated that "over four-fifths of the New Testament" in the KJV is in fact "simply Tyndale's work of eighty years before."¹² The other important predecessor English translations include Miles Coverdale's complete Bible (1535), which comprised the OT, NT and the Apocrypha, this work exercising influence thereafter in "Matthew's" Bible (1537, which incorporated a substantial part of Coverdale's Old Testament), the Great Bible (1539), the Geneva Bible (1560), and the Bishops' Bible (1568).¹³ Acknowledging that "the KJV has often been considered miraculous, being among other things the only time a work of genius has been produced by a committee," Daniell insisted that it is important "to recognise the nature of its particular dependence upon its predecessors," and he underscored "its heavy and often verbatim dependence on Tyndale."¹⁴

Nevertheless, the KJV was a product of fresh and serious scholarly effort. Clearly, along with taking account of the various prior translations (in various European languages), those assigned to the task also made it a key aim to represent accurately in English the Hebrew or Greek of the scriptural texts. The project team was referred to as a body of *translators*, and clearly saw themselves in this role. In this, the KJV reflects key principles of the Protestant setting in which it was produced: (1) the original language texts preferred as the basis of scriptural translation, and (2) the aim to provide the scriptures in an accessible vernacular form for laity as well as clergy.¹⁵

As is now a commonplace observation, the Protestant emphasis upon "original language" texts shows in turn the influence of the "new learning" of the Renaissance, with its emphasis on reading ancient authors in their own language, resulting in a renewed interest in Greek and also Hebrew. Already in 1491 William Grocyn had begun giving lectures on Greek in Oxford, the first offered in that university. In 1518 Cambridge appointed as its first Reader in Greek, Richard Croke, a former pupil of Grocyn.¹⁶ As to Hebrew, there were grammars and dictionaries available from

understandable: the monarch wanted results" (440). The Bishops' Bible never won the popularity enjoyed by the Geneva Bible.

¹¹ There were still earlier efforts to render the Bible in English, including particularly the Wyclif "Lollard" Bibles, translations from the Latin Vulgate in manuscripts from the 1380s and thereafter. See Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 66-95, for discussion.

¹² Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 136, drawing upon John Nielson and Royal Skousen, "How Much of the King James Bible is William Tyndale's?" *Reformation* 3 (1998): 49-74, whose exact figure is 83%. Daniell (136-39) gives examples of Tyndale's translation skill and its influence on the KJV.

¹³ Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 174. Coverdale translated from the Latin with attention given also to German translations by Zwingli, Luther, but his NT was heavily dependent on Tyndale (Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 176).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 430.

¹⁵ Cf. the more reluctant and reserved attitude toward vernacular Bibles in the pre-Reformation period as described by Geoffrey Shepherd, "English Versions of the Scriptures Before Wyclif," *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Fathers to the Reformation*, ed. G. W. H. Lampe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 362-87. Likewise, as to base-text, "All serious work was done in Latin, and biblical scholarship during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was drawing further and further away from the vernaculars" (380).

¹⁶ Peter G. Bietenholz and Thomas B. Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus: A Biographical Register of the Renaissance and Reformation* (3 vols.; Toronto/London: University of Toronto Press, 1985-87), 2:135-36 (on Grocyn); 1:359-60 (on Croke). The year of Croke's appointment is variously put at 1518, 1519, and 1520, the last date given by Bietenholz and Deutscher, but cf., e.g., S. L.

earliest years of the sixteenth century, and as early as 1529 Robert Wakefield served as Cambridge's first Reader in Hebrew.¹⁷

So the KJV translators had the benefit of nearly a century of serious study of Greek and Hebrew. To cite Greenslade's words on the matter:

Scholarship, especially Hebrew scholarship, had much improved in England since the mid-sixteenth century. The excellent continental scholars Fagius, Tremellius and Chevalier had been brought over to teach Hebrew at Cambridge, the early dictionaries and grammars upon which Tyndale and his successor depended had been revised or superseded, and there was more knowledge of the cognate languages, Aramaic and Syriac. Increasing familiarity with Jewish commentaries on the Old Testament was an important factor in bible study and translation.¹⁸

Members of the KJV project who were reputed to have excellent competence in the ancient languages, included Edward Lively, Miles Smith, John Reynolds, Thomas Harrison and Henry Savile.

So, as Greenslade observed, "Although the Bishops' version was to stand where possible, the truth of the original had to be discovered through the best contemporary scholarship."¹⁹ He also judged that, notwithstanding the literary beauties of the KJV, "it is sometimes forgotten that the effect of the translation depends ultimately on the qualities of the original, and that the majority of its variants [from earlier English Bibles, I presume] result not from literary taste but from the advance of scholarship."²⁰

The concern for original languages is reflected overtly in the one exception to the rule that no marginal notes were to be included: Notes were to be allowed "only for the explanation of the Hebrew or Greek words which cannot, without some circumlocution, so briefly and fitly be expressed in the text."²¹ This concern is also reflected in the practice of setting out in a different typeface words for which there was no strict equivalent in the original text. Both of these measures explicitly signalled to readers that the KJV was a *translation*, that accuracy of translation was a concern, and that the Hebrew or Greek text was the key criterion by which their effort was to be judged.

Of course, they were scholars of their age, and the scholarly resources to hand were those of that time. Their Hebrew text (the Massoretic text) was simply what was available then, and (as indicated already) the Greek NT editions used were all based on a very few late-medieval manuscripts.²² It would be unfair, of course, to criticize them for not having access to the more ancient manuscripts that are drawn upon in our

Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible A.D. 1525-1611," *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), 144. Greenslade notes here that after moving to Cambridge Tyndale may have learned Greek from Croke, if he had not already acquired it during his studies in Oxford.

¹⁷ Bietenholz and Deutscher, *Contemporaries of Erasmus*, 3:423. The Hebrew grammar by Matthaeus Adrianus (a baptized Jew of Spanish origins) was published in 1501 and was reprinted and used widely thereafter (*ibid.*, 1:9).

¹⁸ Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible," 165.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 166.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

²¹ From rule 6, as cited in David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7-8..

²² See, e.g., Kurt Aland and Barbara Aland, *The Text of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 3-11.

critical editions today. Also, our grasp of the languages themselves has increased enormously since the early seventeenth century. But everyone is entitled to a trial by peers, and so, judged in their time, I think that the KJV translators have to be given a basically favorable verdict.

To be sure, there were criticisms, the most immediate and well-known a furious attack from Hugh Broughton, *A Censure of the Late Translation for our Churches*, who judged the KJV “so incompetent that it should be burnt.”²³ Broughton, an acknowledged expert in Hebrew, condemned the translators “for timidly relegating numerous correct renderings to the margin.”²⁴ Ambrose Ussher (younger brother of Bishop James Ussher) complained that the KJV was too much a rehash of earlier translations. As Gordon Campbell has noted, however, Ussher’s comments may have the taste of sour grapes, as the publication of the KJV overtook (and rendered less marketable) his own effort to produce a translation of the Bible.²⁵ Moreover, it was a bit unfair, since (as noted earlier) the royal assignment was not to make a new translation but “to make a good one better, or out of many good ones, one principall good one . . .”²⁶ On the other hand, as others have observed, even in 1611 the diction of the KJV was “already a little archaistic.”²⁷ Some among more radical Protestants (Puritans) also objected to the inclusion of the Old Testament Apocrypha, and continued to prefer the Geneva Bible.²⁸ McGrath characterized the initial reception of the KJV more broadly as “polite disinterest,” with “no fanfares of welcome, or accolades of praise” noting that many, including some of the KJV translators continued to cite the Geneva Bible in their writings instead of the KJV “hardly a commendation for their work.” Though the KJV was “the Bible of the English religious and political establishment” of the time, “it had a long way to go before it became the Bible of the English people.”²⁹

But I reiterate the point that, with all its imperfections, the KJV was a remarkable project and a significant product of biblical scholarship of the early modern period. Specifically, as a translation produced by a body of scholars who set to work collegially, it had no precedent, the previous English translations typically the product of individuals. As Norton has observed, the only precedent was in the traditional story of the Septuagint in which seventy translators rendered the Hebrew OT into Greek in the third century BCE, an account which, though legendary, “may have provided a model.”³⁰ We see the influence of the KJV project thereafter, however, in the appointment of groups of scholars to prepare major subsequent Bibles in English: the English Revised Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, the New International Version, etc. The KJV

²³ Gordon Campbell, *The Story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 124.

²⁴ Greenslade, “English Versions of the Bible,” 167.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 124.

²⁶ The words quoted from “The Translators to the Reader,” as given in Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, 3.

²⁷ Greenslade, “English Versions of the Bible,” 167. Campbell notes, for example, the contrast with Ussher’s contemporary preference for “you” instead of “ye”, and Anglo-Saxon words such as “lust” instead of “concupiscence” (*The Story of the King James Version*, 124).

²⁸ Campbell, *The Story of the King James Version*, 124-25.

²⁹ Alister E. McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 278. See McGrath, 278-88, for discussion of the fortunes of the KJV in the early aftermath of its publication.

³⁰ Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible*, 10. The LXX was portrayed as arising from the orders of the monarch Ptolemy, and so James may have aspired to commission something similar.

was not a miracle, but it is appropriate to see it as a commendable example of scholarly cooperative effort.

II

I now want to propose an idea less well established, and so perhaps more debatable. I submit that the KJV was also a factor in promoting the subsequent development of the discipline of Biblical Studies. It will help to consider my proposal if I set out the basics before we consider the matter in more detail. The first observation, which I presume is uncontroversial, is that the massive success of the KJV both benefited from and promoted further an interest in the Bible widely among the general populace. I further suggest that this widely-shared popular interest in reading and interpreting the Bible went with the additional Protestant-inspired expectations that preaching should be a major feature of public worship, and that sound preaching should be focused on the Bible and should reflect serious attention to the biblical text. So, Protestant theological faculties and colleges especially, where ministers were prepared, had to equip their candidates to engage the biblical text, and teaching posts specifically devoted to biblical exegesis came to be essential. Then, as often the case, after a sufficient number of scholars with a specific emphasis developed, that emphasis became a distinguishable discipline and took on its own characteristics and history of development.

Of course, the leading Protestant Reformers had already made serious study of the Bible central to the theological task. Moreover, they had elevated the historical-grammatical meaning of the biblical text, insisting that this “original” historical meaning governed all other applications for theology and edification.³¹ As Stuhlmacher noted, “for Reformation exegesis, the task of the historical illumination of the text is to prepare for theological exegesis . . . and without being an end in itself.”³² So, Reformation exegesis was “emphatically concerned for the original meaning of scripture,” rejecting allegorical exegesis and instead tracing the divine revelation in human history.³³

Moreover, Protestants believed that, as well as theology and preaching, Christian piety should be focused on the Bible as the unique means by which to apprehend God’s will and respond to it. So, the reading of the Bible came to form a frequent feature of personal and family devotional life. We get some idea of the popularity of the Bible from publication statistics. Daniell estimated that over two million Bibles, New Testaments and parts of the Bible were published in England between 1526 and 1640 alone, noting also that for the next hundred years thereafter Bible reading typically meant reading aloud in various settings such as households, rooms in taverns, open air gatherings, and churches.³⁴ “The Bible became the people’s Bible, and Bible-reading a widespread habit.”³⁵

Daniell also notes that the KJV became the dominant form in which English-speaking readers encountered the Bible, describing the period 1660-1710 as “a time of

³¹ See discussion by Robert M. Grant, *A Short History of the Interpretation of the Bible* (rev. ed.; New York: Macmillan, 1963), 128-38, and more extensively in F. W. Farrar, *History of Interpretation* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1886), 307-54, though dated, still worth consulting.

³² Peter Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (trans. R. A. Harrisville; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 34-35.

³³ *Ibid.*, 35.

³⁴ Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 462.

³⁵ Henry S. Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament, Being the History of the Process Whereby the Word of god has won the Right to be Understood* (London/New York: Macmillan Co., 1906), 74.

continual reprinting of the KJV and nothing else.”³⁶ In the later 18th century and thereafter, additional English translations of the Bible appeared, but the KJV remained dominant in Britain.³⁷

Moreover, this was the case also in the USA, from the American Revolution onward. Commenting on the early post-Revolutionary period, Daniell expressed some surprise to find “the solid, near-absolute dependence of this new, adventurous nation on KJV, on the Scriptures in archaic English fixed under a British monarch long before,” this dependence apparently expressive of “a reverential need for what must have been felt to be the ‘proper’ Word of God, the KJV.”³⁸

The printing and distribution of Bibles took on a more ordered and deliberate aspect in the 19th century with the foundation of the British and Foreign Bible Society in 1804, followed by the American Bible Society in 1816. These societies set for themselves ambitious aims in promoting popular reading and possession of copies of the Bible, and they mainly printed and distributed copies of the KJV. As well, popular use of the Bible was promoted via the Sunday School movement, which was initially focused on children from poorer homes (who at that time, typically, were employed six days a week), giving them a weekly opportunity for learning to read and acquiring basic skills in writing and arithmetic, the Bible (i.e., the KJV) central in this endeavour.³⁹

But I return to my proposal that this widespread popular reading and study of the Bible (the KJV the most common English biblical text) and the expectation that preaching from the Bible should be central in Protestant worship contributed to the development of biblical scholarship. From the 17th century onward, and increasingly in the 19th century, there was a wide popular interest in practically anything connected with the Bible, including scholarly work that contributed to illuminating the biblical writings and the historical setting in which they originated and which they reflected. As John Bartlett put it,

In an era when Protestant denominations set a high premium on biblical knowledge and Sunday schools flourished [the 18th century and thereafter], there was increasing interest in biblical geography and in biblical peoples and their customs and a ready market for the hundreds of books published on Palestinian travel and life.⁴⁰

In the 19th century, this only intensified. The foundation of the Palestine Exploration Fund in 1865 had the aim of scholarly investigation of “the Archaeology, Geography, Geology and Natural History of Palestine,” the primary motivation being the illumination of biblical backgrounds, and church leaders were among the earliest

³⁶ Ibid., 488.

³⁷ E.g., some forty-four new translations of the Bible, New Testament or individual biblical books appeared 1700-1800 (Daniell, 604), and Daniell claims that “over 350 new translations of the complete bible and some thousands including new translations of the New Testament alone, and some separate books like the Psalms” since Tyndale’s printed Bible translation (1520s-30s) (ibid., xiii).

³⁸ Ibid., 581. In 1791, however, Isaac Collins printed the KJV, replacing the dedication to King James with “An address to the Reader by Dr. Witherspoon,” which begins by declaring the usual royal dedication to be “wholly unnecessary” and “improper to be continued in an American edition . . .” (ibid., 599-600). The Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon, a Scottish Presbyterian scholar, was the President of the College of New Jersey (subsequently Princeton University), a signatory of the Declaration of Independence. See also McGrath’s discussion of “The King James Bible in America,” 290-300.

³⁹ By 1800, some 200,000 English children were enrolled in Sunday Schools, and by 1850, nearly 2 million. <http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/sunday/hist1.htm>.

⁴⁰ John R. Bartlett, “Archaeology and Biblical Studies,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, gen. ed. J. H. Hayes (2 vols; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 1: 50 (49-56).

supporters and subscribers.⁴¹ In addition to the publication of scholarly work in academic journals, such as the *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, over the course of the 19th century there appeared hundreds of popular-reader books eagerly purchased and read in which scholarly work was more directly related to the biblical text for purposes of edification and inspiration.

The point I wish to emphasize is that the growth in the academic studies of the Bible went alongside (and often specifically addressed) a popular/lay interest in the Bible. Indeed, I contend that academic studies flourished *mainly because* of this popular interest. The Reformation-influenced emphases on the Bible as supreme and on the free study of the Bible by the laity were crucial in the development of the biblical scholarship that emerged in the Reformation and subsequently found its own distinctive place in academia in the 19th century. To cite the words of Henry Nash in his 1906 study of the history of biblical criticism,

Thus, through the religious motive, the first great step was taken in the direction of criticism. The original thought and feeling of Scripture must be discovered and appropriated. Once started upon this road, where could Bible-study bring up, short of the historical interpretation.⁴²

In his more recent history of New Testament research, William Baird made a somewhat similar observation about the relationship of the Reformation to the rise of the scholarly study of the Bible as we know it from the 18th century onward.

Biblical research at the beginning of the Enlightenment was the heir to a large legacy from the Reformation and the Renaissance. From the Reformation, the eighteenth century inherited the belief in the importance of the Bible. If the Scriptures were the sole authority in faith and practice, then study of the Bible was of utmost significance. Moreover, the emphasis the reformers had placed on the single meaning—the literal, or historical—gave impetus to the study of the NT as a historical document. The quest for the one meaning encouraged a search for the original meaning, that is, the meaning which the text had had in the historical situation of the original writers and readers.⁴³

It is, therefore, not a coincidence that Biblical Studies developed in Protestant lands and still flourishes mainly in countries with a Protestant heritage. With some noteworthy predecessors (especially French-speaking scholars such as M.-J. Lagrange and J. Coppens), Roman Catholic biblical scholarship became truly visible and contributory after the papal encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943), and is essentially a phenomenon of the late twentieth century.⁴⁴

Moreover, all of us in the discipline of Biblical Studies should consider this. We have academic posts (and whole departments) in Biblical Studies in theological colleges/seminaries and universities in the West, and we do not have equivalent academic resources in the religious texts and traditions of the ancient Egyptians or

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 50. Similar societies appeared in France, Germany, the USA and elsewhere in the 19th century. E.g., the American Schools of Oriental Research, based in Jerusalem, was founded in 1900.

⁴² Nash, *The History of the Higher Criticism of the New Testament*, 68.

⁴³ William Baird, *History of New Testament Research, Volume One: From Deism to Tübingen* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 3.

⁴⁴ For the text of *Divino afflante Spiritu*, see Dean P. Bécharad (ed.), *The Scripture Documents: An Anthology of Official Catholic Teachings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2002), 115-139. For further discussion, see Robert Bruce Robinson, *Roman Catholic Exegesis Since Divino Afflante Spiritu: Hermeneutical Implications* (SBLDS, 111; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988).

peoples of Mesopotamia or the Mayans, for example (to say nothing of other living traditions such as Buddhism and Islam), not because the latter are inherently less interesting, but because there have been and continue to be significant numbers of Christians and Jews in Western societies and sufficient influences of the Bible in these societies to make biblical studies seem an appropriate subject to which to commit the resources necessary for it to function as an academic discipline. To put the matter baldly, Biblical Studies as we know it is in this sense parasitic on the religious communities for whom the Bible is scripture. Biblical scholars may not always like to acknowledge this, and the religious communities may not always (or even often) be happy with what some biblical scholars have to say; but there would be no such commitment to the discipline in higher education if there were not a sufficient number of people in our societies to make what biblical scholars do of some (at least occasional) interest to people beyond their academic associations. Even scholars who seem to delight in “naughty” and controversial things about the Bible should recognize that their comments receive attention outside circles of other academics the discipline only because the Bible is still held widely with some special esteem. All parties should understand, therefore, that were the Bible to become widely enough regarded as simply a body of ancient texts, solely of use in studying religious movements of a now-distant and irrelevant past, no one would care much what biblical scholars have to say, whether affirmative or negative, edifying or “naughty”.

As histories of Biblical Studies commonly indicate, the embryonic developments toward a discrete discipline can be traced back into the 18th century, for example, in the programmatic address by Johann Philipp Gabler (1787), in which he marked out a Biblical Theology from (and as a sound basis for) Dogmatic Theology.⁴⁵ Some other scholars of that time focused more on a straight historical approach to the biblical texts, emphasizing their time-conditioned nature (e.g., Johann Semler). But the full emergence of a discipline of Biblical Studies came in the 19th century. It was a trans-national development, the main contributors being German-speaking and English-speaking scholars. There are excellent histories of these developments, and I have neither the space here nor the competence to do justice to them myself. I simply reiterate the points that the ready availability of the Bible in English and the promotion of the reading and study of the Bible in the general population was a major force promoting the development of Biblical Studies, and that the KJV was the major vehicle through which that popular reading and study of the Bible spread across the centuries after its appearance.

III

In the final part of this discussion I wish to focus on an irony: The flowering of scholarship on the Bible, to which the KJV was a contributing factor, led to an increasingly critical appraisal of the KJV, with the result that it was superseded as a satisfactory English translation. Within the limits of this discussion, I confine myself to scholarly work that focused on recovering a more adequate the Greek text to serve as the basis for translation of the NT. This is both an area in which I can claim some competence and also perhaps the most important basis on which the KJV first came to be seen as seriously dated. Developments in the study of Koine Greek and in text-

⁴⁵ Hendrikus Boers, “Gabler, Johann Philipp,” *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*, gen. ed., J. H. Hayes (2 vols.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1999), 1: 425-26.

critical work on the Hebrew OT further pointed up limitations of the KJV, but these came later than the NT text-critical work that I discuss here.⁴⁶

As the base text for the KJV NT, the translators relied mainly upon the 1589 and 1598 editions of the Greek NT by Theodore Beza, but they also consulted, and sometimes preferred, alternate readings in the Complutensian Polyglot, the editions of the Greek NT by Erasmus, and the 1550 Stephanus edition (later editions of which came to be called the “*Textus Receptus*”).⁴⁷ As is well known now, however, all of these editions were based on a very few late manuscripts, and so were what came to be seen as pre-critical editions. But in fairness, although a few earlier manuscripts had become available, in particular Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (Codex D in NT scholarship), in 1611 the discipline of textual criticism really had not yet been born.⁴⁸

Indeed, although the initial recognition of textual variation in manuscripts of the Greek NT surfaced in publications of the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and there were also some initial conceptual developments in this period (e.g., Bengel’s efforts to group manuscripts), it was Johann Jakob Griesbach (1745-1812) who, in Metzger’s words, “laid foundations for all subsequent work on the Greek text of the New Testament,” his principal editions published in 1775-77 (Halle) and in 1796-1806 (London).⁴⁹ He was the first to produce a Greek NT that departed from the *Textus Receptus* at a number of places, preferring readings from earlier and better textual witnesses than those on which the *Textus Receptus* rested.⁵⁰ But the first scholar to produce an edition of the Greek NT that rested entirely on the application of text-critical principles in the assessment of variant readings was Karl Lachmann in 1831.

For all its historic importance, however, Lachmann’s edition was in fact based on a small number of manuscripts.⁵¹ The figure who “sought out more manuscripts and produced more critical editions of the Greek Bible than any other single scholar” was Constantine von Tischendorf (1815-74). After his university studies in theology (1834-38), from the age of 25 Tischendorf devoted himself to this work, visiting various libraries in Europe and the Middle East in search of manuscripts of the Greek NT. His most famous (and subsequently controversial) discovery was Codex

⁴⁶ As a result of discovery of large amounts of papyri from the NT period, beginning in the final years of the 19th century scholars were able to revise significantly our grasp of Koine Greek syntax and semantics. Key figures include Adolf Deissmann (e.g., *Bible Studies: Contributions From Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity* [German 1897; ET, Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1923]). Developments in OT textual criticism came with the discovery of earlier Hebrew manuscripts, especially from Qumran, and also earlier manuscripts of the Greek OT.

⁴⁷ Scrivener, 59-60. Scrivener (243-63) examined 252 passages where the KJV appears to exhibit choices among the readings of these various editions of the Greek NT, counting 113 where the KJV chose Beza against Stephanus, 59 agreements with Stephanus against Beza, and 80 cases of agreement with the Complutensian Polyglot, Erasmus, or the Vulgate against both Stephanus and Beza. See Scrivener’s summary, 60.

⁴⁸ Codex Bezae (5th century CE) had been presented to the library of Cambridge University in 1581 by Theodore Beza, a French scholar who succeeded Calvin as leader of the Genevan church. Its peculiarities in readings, however, often made scholars unsure how to use it.

⁴⁹ Bruce M. Metzger, Bart D. Ehrman, *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, corruption, and Restoration* (4th ed.; New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 165, 167.

⁵⁰ “The importance of Griesbach for New Testament textual criticism can scarcely be overestimated.” Ibid., 167.

⁵¹ F. H. A. Scrivener, *A Plain Introduction to the Criticism of the New Testament* (4th ed.; 2 vols.; London: Bell, 1894), 2: 233, claimed that Lachmann’s edition “seldom rests on more than four Greek codices,” and often on still fewer.

Sinaiticus, which is now housed in the British Library, a 4th-century manuscript of the complete Bible in Greek.⁵² Tischendorf also produced several printed editions of the Greek NT, the most important being the eighth edition (issued in two volumes in 1869-72), which has a valuable critical apparatus giving all the variant readings that he and earlier scholars had found in manuscripts, versions, and early Fathers.⁵³

But British scholars of the time made their contributions as well to the critical approach to the establishment of the text of the NT, among them perhaps none so remarkable as Samuel Prideaux Tregelles (1813-75). Metzger judged him “the scholar who, at the middle of the nineteenth century was most successful in drawing British preference away from the Textus Receptus,” and Baird referred to him as “the most important British text critic of the day.”⁵⁴ Tregelles’ scholarly work is all the more extraordinary as he was largely self-taught, his formal education not extending beyond secondary school. While working in an ironworks to provide a livelihood, he taught himself Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic and Welsh, and early on devoted himself to preparing a truly critical edition of the Greek NT with a zeal fired by his evangelical Christian faith. In addition to numerous other published works, his critical edition of the Greek NT appeared 1857-79, based on critical principles that he had published earlier.⁵⁵ Without knowing it, Tregelles’ critical principles matched remarkably those of Lachmann. In pursuit of his aim of basing a critical edition on the earliest and best manuscripts, Tregelles travelled to various libraries in Europe to collate important witnesses, and he became a respected collator whose work corrected numerous erroneous citations of these witnesses. He also made his own examination of NT quotations in Greek Fathers down to Eusebius (4th century) and studied ancient versions as well.

But, unquestionably, the cap-stone of the many 19th-century researches on the textual history of the Greek NT was the 1881 edition by B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, “the most noteworthy critical edition of the Greek Testament ever produced by British scholarship.”⁵⁶ Indeed, I am not alone in going further to judge the edition by Westcott-Hort, together with the accompanying introductory volume, as the single most influential work of NT textual criticism of the 19th century.⁵⁷ It has exercised a

⁵² The story of Tischendorf’s discovery of Codex Sinaiticus has often been told. See, e.g., Metzger and Ehrman, 62-64. The British Library now has a web site devoted to Codex Sinaiticus: <http://codexsinaiticus.org/en/>.

⁵³ Constantinus Tischendorf, *Novum Testamentum Graece, Editio Octava Critica Maior* (2 vols.; Leipzig: Giesecke et Devrient, 1869/72).

⁵⁴ Metzger and Ehrman, 173; Baird, 326. It is curiously difficult to find a proper treatment of Tregelles in histories of biblical scholarship. For example, in spite of Baird’s glowing statement of his importance, Tregelles gets scarcely more than this passing notice. There is no entry for him in Hayes, *Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation*. There is, however, a Wikipedia entry: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Prideaux_Tregelles.

⁵⁵ Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, *The Greek New Testament, Edited from Ancient Authorities, with their Various Readings in Full, and the Latin Version of Jerome* (London: Samuel Bagster & Sons, 1857-79); *idem*, *An Account of the Printed Text of the Greek New Testament: With Remarks on Its Revision Upon Critical Principles; Together with a Collation of the Critical Texts of Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf, with That in Common Use* (London: Samuel Bagster, 1854).

⁵⁶ Metzger and Ehrman, 174.

⁵⁷ Brooke Foss Westcott and Fenton John Anthony Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Volume 1* (Cambridge/London: Macmillan, 1881); *idem*, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Introduction, Appendix* (Cambridge/London: Macmillan 1882). After their extended account of the work of Westcott and Hort, Metzger and Ehrman (*The Text of the New Testament*, 183) stated that “the overwhelming consensus of scholarly opinion recognizes that their critical edition was truly epoch-making.” For their discussion, see *ibid.*, 174-83.

unique influence on subsequent critical editions of the NT, including the standard hand-editions such as the Nestle-Aland editions and the United Bible Societies' *Greek New Testament*.

Throughout the period of text-critical endeavour that we have reviewing here so briefly (and inadequately), there was an ever-increasing recognition that the textual basis behind the KJV (and other pre-critical translations such as the Luther Bible) was unsatisfactory in representing the best estimate of the "original" text of the NT. This in turn meant that the KJV itself was unsatisfactory in conveying the "original" text of the NT in English. To cite perhaps the most blatant example, it became clear that, although Mark 16:9-20 was attested in the great mass of medieval-era manuscripts, these verses were not a part of the original text of the Gospel of Mark. Likewise, the equally well-known *pericope* of the adulterous woman commonly included in medieval copies of the Gospel of John was found to be an interpolation.⁵⁸ As well, the KJV was judged to reflect an inferior critical text at a host of other (albeit smaller) instances.

The work of 19th-century NT textual criticism is commonly referred to as culminating in the de-throning of the *Textus Receptus*, and the wide-scale scholarly recognition that a critical edition of the Greek NT must be based on sound text-critical principles and the earliest and best manuscripts. Westcott and Hort in particular are credited with demonstrating to the satisfaction of most scholars of the time that the sort of text reflected in the *Textus Receptus* (which Hort called the Syrian text, a.k.a. the Medieval or Byzantine text-type) is later than and inferior to the form of text found in better witnesses such as Codex Vaticanus.

Also, as noted already, this had obvious ramifications on the usefulness of the KJV. This was reflected in the production of the Revised Version of the KJV in 1881-85.⁵⁹ This Revised Version was not terribly successful in displacing the KJV, however, but this seems at least in part because of its deficiencies as a translation. In Daniell's rather forthright statement, "The chief and uncontrovertible reason for the British public not accepting the Revised Version was that it was not very good."⁶⁰ "Not very good" here, however, seems to refer more to the allegedly inelegant phrasing in comparison with the more familiar KJV.

Nevertheless, in the wider Bible-reading public, including notably more sophisticated readers such as those of the literary set, the KJV has remained widely read, indeed preferred by many, even after the comparatively well-received *Revised Standard Version* (1952), the *New English Bible*, and the many other English translations of the Bible. This unquestionably reflects an affection for what has become familiar Bible-wording, and an appreciation for the undoubted literary qualities of the KJV. But also unquestionably, as a work of biblical scholarship the KJV came to be judged as dated and faulty. Moreover, if the Bible is read, not for aesthetic purposes but with historical interests or as Holy Scripture and with a concern for a translation based on a good critical edition of the biblical writings, the KJV comes up short.

⁵⁸ See, e.g., Westcott and Hort, *The New Testament in the Original Greek, Introduction, Appendix*, 28-51 (on Mark 16:9-20), and 82-88 (on John 7:53—8:11).

⁵⁹ *The New Testament of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ : translated out of the Greek ; being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with most ancient authorities and revised A.D. 1881* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1881); *The Holy Bible containing the Old and New Testaments translated out of the original tongues : being the version set forth A.D. 1611 compared with the most ancient authorities and revised* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1885).

⁶⁰ Daniell, *The Bible in English*, 700, and 683-700 for further discussion of the work.

So, in sum, we are left with this interesting irony: The KJV, itself a worthy product of scholarship of its time, helped to further the conditions that promoted the development of the matured discipline of biblical scholarship in the centuries after its publication, and this biblical scholarship revealed in turn the shortcomings of the KJV and brought about its supersession as an adequate translation of the Bible. Nevertheless, the KJV remains a towering production in the history of the Bible translations, and rightly retains a devoted following of readers (religious and non-religious) for whom it is uniquely the Bible in English.