

Should We Still Use the KJV Today?

A review article by G. I. Williamson

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A New Hearing for The Authorized Version (second edition, 1997) by Theodore P. Letis, Ph.D., 34 pages. Published by The Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Studies, 6417 N. Fairhill, Philadelphia, PA 19126. Price not stated.

The argument presented in this small book is to the effect that we should return to the use of the Authorized Version of the Bible (commonly referred to as the King James Version or KJV) in our churches. And in support of this advocacy two major reasons are given. The first is the author's contention that, unlike almost all of the legion of modern versions, the KJV is based on the text found in the majority of ancient Greek manuscripts. The second is his contention that it is still the most faithful translation of the original Hebrew and Greek. He even defends the retention of such antiquated elements as the pronoun "ye" because it provides a way for the average reader to clearly distinguish between the singular and plural—something that is not possible with the modern English versions.

It is the conviction of this reviewer that the author's argument for much greater respect for the majority text (on which most of the KJV was based) than has been the rule in recent years, is right. Discussions with Dr. Edward F. Hills, many years ago, brought me to this conviction. His arguments—and those of John William Burgon on whose work he built—have never really been refuted, in my judgment. It is also my conviction that the author is right in his contention that the so-called "dynamic-equivalence" method of translation employed by the authors of most modern versions has been a catastrophic mistake. As Dr. Jacob Van Bruggen rightly says: "When the translator starts reducing the author's form....the possibility of letting his own theological prejudices influence the determination of what is essential and what is not essential is far greater than when he sticks as closely as possible to the textual form handed down." It is the author's view that in the past it was faithfulness in strict rendering of the Hebrew and Greek idioms that made the great translations (such as the LXX, Luther's German Bible, and the KJV) transformers of both language and culture. This is what is needed today— not another modern version that will dumb itself down to the level of the prevailing culture, but rather one that will impact it the way these translations did.

All in all, then, this small booklet puts forward a powerful case—powerful, that is, to a point. But when it also argues for the retention of thee/thou, ye/you language I find it disappointing. I say this because I remain convinced of the correctness of the Westminster Confession of Faith (I, 8) when it says:

...because these original tongues are not known to all the people of God, who have right unto, and interest in the Scriptures, and are commanded, in the fear of God, to read and search them, therefore they are to be translated into the vulgar language of every nation unto which they come, that, the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.

The author himself seems to realize this when he says: “I am not, of course, arguing from these facts that the A.V. could never be improved” (p.18). Well, it has been improved precisely where it was needed—in the New King James Version (NKJV). For this reason, as well as for other reasons cogently argued in this little book, I find the NKJV to be my version of choice for use in the pulpit and in teaching.