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English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation (Book Review)

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of Judgment, further explores the idea that God's judgment does not look anything like we expect or desire it to look like. The touchstones of divine judgment are not retribution and the lake of fire, but resurrection and pardon. Quite simply, God is not mad at the world; and his book-keeping reads "Jesus" on every line. God works his judgment by going out of the judgment business, by Jesus taking all enmity away on the cross.

As the reader may have surmised, a happy universalism informs Capon's analysis of the parables. Grace includes rather than excludes. While universalism has a long history in Episcopalian circles (Capon is an Episcopal priest), his articulation of the universalist idea follows a form that we are beginning to see quite

a bit of these days: every one is redeemed except those who consciously and deliberately deny Christ (*Judgment*, 12ff). Capon's Episcopalian roots also show themselves in his incarnational view of the church.

These problems, serious as they are, do not detract from the value of these books. Capon is an exciting thinker, and his style is unpredictable and engagingly conversational. He is far from perfect, sometimes less than fully orthodox, but never boring. There is always plenty to chew on, and most of it is nourishing. Pastors will especially appreciate the works. There must be at least a year's worth of preachable ideas about the parables here. Anyone who is interested in Scripture, and especially the parables, will be entertained and edified.

The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation, 2nd ed., by Jack P. Lewis (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991). 512 pages. Paperback. \$21.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

"And Jacob sod pottage; and Esau come from the field, and he was faint" (Gen. 25:29). What was Jacob doing? "Thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing" (Ps. 5:6). So much for renting an apartment! "Solomon loved many strange women" (1 Kgs. 11:1). What were they, Republican welfare mothers? "We do you to wit of the grace of God" (2 Cor. 8:1). What? Say that again. In English this time.

Language changes. A reading of the King James Bible will quickly show today's reader that the English language is dynamic. Words have lives; they are born and then they die. Better yet, they are commodities. They come into use to communicate and are simply forgotten when they no longer fulfill that function. Sometimes they stick around, but with entirely different meanings. Witness the change in meaning the word *gay* has undergone in just the last two decades. While it retains its older denotation of "joyous" or "merry," its transformation into a predicate adjective referring to a male homosexual has all but assured that its former denotation will fall out of common use.

Lewis has no problem with the proposition that—as William Tyndale put it—the Bible should be made plain for the common man. His problem is with those who believe that the Bible should be locked up in archaic language, arcane idioms, and outdated constructions. There is a subtle polemic running throughout his fourteen extended reviews of English Bibles ranging from the King James Version of 1611 to the New Revised Standard of 1990. Positively stated, the thesis is that every translation or version of the Bible has more virtues than faults (8). Negatively, and here we see the polemic, he contends that modern translations are not

the fruit of gigantic conspiracies meant "to draw people into religious error." The confessional peculiarities and theological lunacies of Christendom are not caused by what translation people read, but rather by the fact they do not read at all (410).

Each chapter contains a comprehensive review about a given version. Lewis analyzes the accuracy of translation, discusses how well they communicate, the variety of renderings, the style, the textual base, the punctuation, format, approach to translation, theological stance, marginal notes, vocabulary, printing problems, disputed features, public reception of the version, and something of the story of how each came about in the first place. This is often done by use of long lists of comparisons, list that Lewis himself admits make for tedious reading (61), but they do make his case, as well as show the careful research behind his evaluations.

The book includes chapters on the King James Version, American Standard Version, Revised Standard Version, New English Bible, New American Standard Bible, Jerusalem Bible, New American Bible, the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses, Living Bible, Good News Bible, New International Version, New King James Version, Revised English Bible, and New Revised Standard Version.

Besides criticizing the New World Translation of the Jehovah's Witnesses (a thoroughly bizarre and "tendentious" translation), Lewis criticizes three other versions. That the Living Bible is a paraphrase of the ASV (1901) does not bother Lewis, for all translations resort to paraphrase at times. But Lewis thinks the Living Bible is a bad paraphrase, full of commentary and glosses, capricious renderings, and unwarranted theological in-

sertions. Ken Taylor, the author paraphraser, sees the world through dispensationalist glasses. For example, he renders John 1:17 to read, "Moses gave us only the law" (this isn't just poor; it's downright wrong), and he paraphrases "the curse of the law" in Gal. 3:13 as the "doom of that impossible system" (246). This is dispensationalist theologizing on the law, plain and simple.

While the Living Bible was a project without literary merit, and one that spoon fed millenarianism to its readers, it was immensely successful. That success should say something to those who oppose modern Bible translations. Some people believe that the only real Bible is the KJV. Many of the problems and debates relevant to biblical revision arise from misconceptions about the KJV. "Many people believe that the KJV is the Bible against which all new translations are to be measured. Some assume that the KJV, if not inspired, is at least free from doctrinal problems and thus becomes a refuge from questions raised by the novelties in the new translations" (35). Lewis goes to some lengths to show not only that the KJV is archaic for the modern reader, but that identifying the KJV is a real problem. Which version of the more than thirty revisions are we to take as authoritative? Moreover, "If revision has been tolerated and even encouraged in the past, why should it be terminated now" (40). Lewis points out that the KJV can be as paraphrastic as other versions. In fact, paraphrase is sometimes necessary, because the sentence structure and grammar of both the OT Hebrew and the NT Greek differ so widely from English. The point, however, is that the KJV is not inherently more faithful to the Hebrew and Greek texts than other versions.

One of the more unfortunate elements of the KJV is that it is based upon a problematic textual base. The translators had but twenty-five NT manuscripts at their disposal, and those were often carelessly used. Today we have over 5300 manuscripts and fragments from which to determine the most original reading of a text. It is on this note that Lewis concentrates his polemic against the New King James Version (1982). The NKJV is a deliberate effort to pretend that two centuries of

manuscript discovery and the rise of textual criticism did not take place.

The NKJV's application of Elizabethian style to twentieth-century vocabulary and grammar ends up in a "new old English," in a quaint version that is designed to be an antique right from the printer. "Why create something which is unlike the way English-speaking people ever expressed themselves?" (339). The fact that the NT was written in Koine, the common Greek of the Roman world, argues strongly against imprisoning Scripture into Tudor or Jacobean (supposedly "biblical") style or vocabulary.

Translating is a human enterprise. Thus no translation is perfect. Yet the Word of God speaks through each and every version which is presently on the market. Even the New World Translation cannot totally obscure the gospel. Some are better than others, to be sure; but any Bible is better than none at all. As Lewis states (more by implication than direct assertion), where explicit theological choices were made in Bible translation—and thus an attempt to skew the interpretation of the text—it has come more often from conservative circles than liberal.

Which versions does Lewis praise? I will let the reader discover that for himself. But beware, this is not for the causal reader. Its appropriate audience is probably the seminary student. If that does not include you, I'll give you a hint. Although its style is a little flat, the Good News Bible (sometimes referred to as Today's English Version) is as good as it gets for accuracy (286). It all depends on your needs and tastes. If you want a study Bible, you might want to choose the Good News. If you are seeking readability, look at the Revised English or perhaps the Jerusalem Bible.

The one or two criticisms I would lodge are that the introductory chapter on the history of the English Bible before the KJV is a bit skimpy; and a separate chapter covering major manuscript finds, textual criticism, and translation philosophies would have been helpful. Otherwise, it is a most helpful book in making sense of the present variety of biblical translations.

Reformational Theology: A New Paradigm for Doing Dogmatics, by Gordon J. Spykman (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1992. 560 pages, hardcover. \$39.95. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

Gordon Spykman has enjoyed a career of important contributions to the confessional life and theological reflection of the Reformed community, both nationally and internationally. *Reformational Theology* is his magnum opus, and it represents a true milestone in Reformed dogmatics. Quite simply, this is a work that

no one who has an interest in Reformed theology can afford not to read. It is easily the most important book to appear in Reformed theology since Anthony Hoekema's *The Bible and the Future* (1982), possibly since the English translation of G.C. Berkouwer's *Sin* (1971). In terms of its scope and its setting in the North