

THE AUTHORISED VERSION AND THE BRETHREN

Neil T.R. Dickson

George Higgins was a serious man. He was in the meeting in Kirkintilloch, a small industrial town in East Dunbartonshire to the north of Glasgow, when I was received into its fellowship in my early teens in the late 1960s. Probably in his seventies when I knew him, he was simple and earnest, and had that grave air which a lifetime's membership of the Scottish Open Brethren characteristically gave. I have therefore no reason to believe, then or now, that he was being in the least bit ironical when he solemnly told me that if the Authorised Version was good enough for Paul, it was good enough for him.¹

In some ways it is curious that this translation came to be held in such high regard among the Brethren. Its link with the state and the Anglican establishment was indicated by the name by which it was commonly referred to by the Brethren, following the then universal usage. It was not the King James Version (KJV), as after the American manner it is now more generally called, but it was the Authorised Version (AV)—a title incidentally the translation did not use of itself.² My grandfather, also a member of that same meeting in

1. Mr Higgins may already have heard the comment. In a work published by the Brethren publisher John Ritchie, J.L. Erck states that a former bishop of Exeter told of a young deacon making an identical comment, a story which, Erck states, 'is almost too good to be true': J.L. Erck, *Through Peril and Flame: The story of the English Bible* (Kilmarnock [1929]), p.93. Stories of similar remarks were widely circulated among Brethren, although their narrators usually recounted them with a degree of mirth.

2. David Norton, *The King James Bible: A short history from Tyndale to today* (Cambridge, 2011), p.17, points out that 'authorised' was used of the fourth and sixth editions (1541) of the Great Bible; however, it is possible the relevant order in council regarding the AV has been lost. The present paper will retain 'Authorised Version' as this was the title used of it historically within the Brethren.

Kirkintilloch, pointed out to me, this time with evident amusement, that the Brethren received an unfavourable mention in the dedication to King James which every copy of the AV carried. The translators, it states, might be traduced by ‘Popish persons’ on the one hand and on the other side, we shall be maligned by self-conceited Brethren, who run their own ways, and give liking unto nothing, but what is framed by themselves, and hammered on their anvil...³

Of course, as my grandfather knew, it was not ‘our’ Brethren that were intended. The intended target was the contemporary Puritans, who took the Protestant principle of the interpretation of scripture further than the authorities in the early seventeenth-century Church of England would have liked. William Tyndale, whose translation of 1526 was ‘the first of that majestic sequence’ which led to the AV in 1611,⁴ had not used ecclesiastical terms. He replied to Sir Thomas More’s criticisms of his practice of not using the word ‘church’ by noting that the clergy ‘had appropriate unto themselves the term that of right is common unto the whole congregation of them that believe in Christ’. Therefore, he wrote, ‘in the translation of the New Testament, where I found this word *ecclesia*, I interpreted it, by this word congregation.’⁵ Likewise he used ‘senior’ for *presbyteros* instead of ‘priest’. Miles Coverdale in his translation of 1535 had followed Tyndale’s practice, but although the AV was to follow Tyndale in many places, the rules that Richard Bancroft, then the bishop of London and a staunch opponent of the Puritans, drew up which were to be observed by the translators stated: ‘The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz. The word ‘church’ not to be translated ‘congregation’ etc.’⁶ As Gordon Campbell notes, the use of

3. ‘To the Most High and Mighty Prince James... The translators of the Bible...’, *The Holy Bible... Appointed to be read in churches* [1611].

4. David Daniell, ‘Preface’, in *The New Testament Translated by William Tyndale: The text of the Worms edition of 1526 in its original spelling* (London, 2000), p.vi.

5. William Tyndale, ‘An Answer unto Sir Thomas More’s Dialogue’, in Thomas Russell (ed.), *The Works of the English Reformers: William Tyndale and John Firth*, vol. 2 (London, 1831), p.14.

6. Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The story of the King James Version 1611-2011* (Oxford, 2010), p.36.

traditional ecclesiastical language, such as ‘bishop’ or ‘priest’ was to be a fruitful source of Puritan objections to the new translation.⁷

AV approval

It may not have been the Brethren that the dedication had in mind, but if the translators had foreknowledge of the movement, they would surely have applied identical animadversions on them. But the Brethren, for their part, knew which side they agreed with on the use of ecclesiastical language. In the preface to the second edition of his *The New Testament: A New Translation* (1871) Darby felt that a revision of the AV was ‘desirable for ecclesiastical use’.⁸ Both his translation, originally published in 1868, and John Bowes’s *The New Testament translated from the purest Greek* (1870) used ‘assembly’ for *ecclesia* and otherwise avoided traditional Church language. Henry Pickering, writing in 1933, noted with approval the translation that the Revised Version (RV) gave of Ephesians 4.12, that spiritual gifts were given ‘unto the work of ministering’ rather than the AV’s ‘for the work of the ministry’. Pickering claimed that the RV translation demonstrated ‘Gifts were given not to be “ministers”, but to minister unto the Body.’⁹ This concurred better with Brethren ecclesiology. Brethren writers felt the AV was also lacking in several other regards. ‘Its weak points and failures’, Wigram excused the AV renderings of the Psalms, ‘grew up out of comparative ignorance in the learned translators of the subject of Old Testament prophecy.’¹⁰ The Brethren had received more light on the meaning of scripture. The early writers in the movement were familiar with the original languages, and the practice of the AV translators in using several English synonyms for the same word in the original languages also annoyed them, possibly because of a predilection for the literal over

7. *Ibid.*

8. ‘Revised Preface To Second Edition Of The New Testament’, *The Holy Scriptures: A New Translation from the Original Languages* (London, 1871), <<http://www.ccel.org/bible/jnd/darby.htm#a>> [accessed August 2011].

9. Hy Pickering, *1000 Wonderful Things about the Bible gleaned from many sources for all who love the grand old book* (London and Glasgow [1933]), p.129.

10. G.V. Wigram, ‘Remarks on the English Psalter’, in *Memorials of the Ministry of G.V. Wigram, Vol. II, ecclesiastical and critical* (London, 1880), p.100.

the poetic. They also knew that knowledge of the ancient languages had grown since the early seventeenth century. In Samuel Prideaux Tregelles the movement had possessed a textual scholar of the first rank who had realised that the Greek *textus receptus*, on which the AV was based, had no great ancient authority and that in its contemporary state had many inaccuracies. He set out to produce a critical Greek text based on the best available manuscripts which would cite the authorities for its textual readings, and which appeared in stages between 1857 and 1872.¹¹ Commentators such as Kelly, and Darby in his translation, were thus able to take advantage of the work of men such as Tregelles, whom Darby could cite along with others such as Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf.¹² Consequently his *New Translation* set out a full critical apparatus at the foot of each column which demonstrated the evidence he had used to arrive at his translation.¹³ So, despite deepest admiration for the AV, Brethren frequently felt the need to offer alternative renderings in their writings.

But regardless of these considerable reservations, in common with the rest of the English-speaking world, the AV held a unique place among the Brethren. In a movement so determinedly steeped in scripture, it had an unequalled place in its members' lives. In spite of Pickering's reservations over some points of AV translation, he claimed, with a preacher's emphasis, that it 'remains the finest piece of English literature, and the *greatest source of spiritual comfort* to

11. E.C. Marchant, 'Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux (1813-1875)', rev. J.K. Elliott, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004): <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27681>> [accessed 15 August 2011]; Tregelles went with B.W. Newton in the 1848 Plymouth division.

12. 'Revised Preface' in *A New Translation*. Doubtless Darby's ability to do so was itself based on the work of Tregelles in the latter's *Collation of the texts of Griesbach, Scholz, Lachmann, and Tischendorf, with that in common use* (1854); it is ironical, given Darby's attitude to those associated with Newton, that his translation was based on the work of a follower of Newton.

13. F.F. Bruce, *History of the Bible in English from the earliest versions*, 3rd edn (Guildford and London, 1979), p.132; later compact editions of Darby's *New Translation* only indicated where the *textus receptus* had been departed from except in Revelation where Darby had not indicated such differences.

men.’¹⁴ When Brethren writers felt they had to alter an AV translation, they often prefaced it with an apology. George Wigram, before he amended the translation of the Psalms, was impelled to note that he accepted the AV as the provision of God. ‘My lot had been cast providentially where the English language had sway,’ he wrote, ‘and I had received the authorized [*sic*] version as a gift from God in His grace and providence.’¹⁵ Darby, in presenting his *New Translation*, felt the need to note it was not a correction of the AV:

There are some remarks I would desire to make on the English Authorised Version, which would debar me from attempting to correct it, which indeed would be a more ambitious task. Its value and beauty are known, and I need not dilate upon. I have lived upon it, though of course studying the Greek myself; I have no wish to underrate it.¹⁶

When William Kelly passes strictures on the italicised words in the AV translation of 1 John 2.2, an indication of the translators’ insertions, which he felt ‘conveys a wrong meaning’, he feels the need to state:

It is no pleasure to make such a remark on the common English Version: they are the words of a friend, of one who, as a whole, values the plain English Bible beyond any other version in general use.¹⁷

AV versus RV

The New Testament of the RV which appeared in 1881 was the first substantial revision of the AV,¹⁸ and it set out to amend the perceived faults of its predecessor. The translators were able to make use of the detailed textual work of men such as Tregelles, who would have been

14. Pickering, *1000 Wonderful Things*, p.120.

15. Wigram, ‘Remarks on the English Psalter’, in *Memorials*, p.100.

16. ‘Revised Preface’ in *A New Translation*.

17. W. Kelly, *Lectures on the Day of Atonement, Lev. XVI* (London, 1889), p.52; cf. pp. 27-8 on what he feels is a mistranslation of Heb 2.17, where he writes it ‘is one of those verbal oversights that we find occasionally even in the admirable Authorised Version.’

18. There had been some light revision to the text of the AV since it first appeared in 1611, chiefly by Benjamin Blayney in the eighteenth century.

among them if ill-health had not prevented him.¹⁹ The RV was therefore able to offer more accurate translations of the Greek text. It also eliminated the AV's plentiful use of synonyms which had so annoyed Brethren writers such as Kelly or had been eradicated by Darby in his *New Translation*. Among the works which the translators consulted was Darby's translation,²⁰ and another Exclusive Brethren member was a significant individual for the production of the RV. Henry Frowde was the manager of the London warehouse for Bible stock of the Oxford University Press (OUP). He was formally appointed Publisher to the University of Oxford in 1883, and he was important for the expansion of Bible production by the Press.²¹ When he had started work for it in 1874, there were twenty-five editions of the Bible published by OUP, but by 1894 this had risen to seventy-eight, and it was he who introduced printing on India paper in 1875 which greatly enhanced the appearance of Bibles and made them more readily portable. When the RV New Testament was issued, Frowde had the press publish a million copies within twelve hours, an achievement until then unparalleled.²² It was this feat which made its rapid and enthusiastic reception possible.

Among those who welcomed the RV were many Brethren. One such was John Brown, a leader in the Churches of God separation of 1892-4, commonly known as 'the Needed Truth'. Brown had later returned to the fellowship of the Open Brethren in Scotland, but had retained many of his previous more sectarian opinions. According to F.F. Bruce, who in his youth knew Brown personally, he 'had taught himself a little Greek and rather less Hebrew':

He was wholeheartedly devoted to the Revised New Testament of 1881 and its underlying text, declaring that 'where Lachmann,

19. Bruce, *Bible in English*, p.139.

20. *Ibid.*, p.132.

21. Martin Maw, 'Frowde, Henry (1841-1927)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/33280>> [accessed 31 Aug 2011]. I am grateful to Dr Timothy Stunt for drawing my attention to Frowde.

22. W.B.C., 'Henry Frowde, M.A.', in Hy Pickering (ed.), *Chief Men Among the Brethren (Acts 15.22): 100 records and photos of brethren beloved* (London & Glasgow, 1931), pp.181-3.

Tregelles, Tischendorf, and Westcott and Hort agree, you verily have what the Spirit saith', and that 'it is impossible to know the mind of God if you depend on the Authorized Version', 'Will anyone tell me', he would challenge from the platform, 'that the last twelve verse of Mark's Gospel are the Word of God?'

'No one,' adds Bruce, 'naturally, would have dared to tell him any such thing.'²³ Brown was among the honoured roll of the movement's many autodidacts, but as Bruce's account makes clear, he was also among the many who delighted in being contrarians. The latter point suggests that not all among the Brethren were in favour of the RV. Kelly in his comments on it can be positively sarcastic, as when in one of his lectures he is about to disagree with it over a point of translation:

Let me only finish now what I would say by drawing your attention to a verse which is given rightly in the Authorised Version, but with grievous defect in the Revised Version. This is rather a serious charge, when one thinks of a work which was produced by a considerable company (some of them really learned); afterwards introduced with no small blowing of trumpets; and received with abundant cordiality, if we may judge by the tons of the New Testament copies sold immediately.²⁴

Nor was he always impressed with their selection of which textual reading to follow. Kelly disagreed with the RV translation of Romans 3.22, where, he wrote, the revisers were 'Led away by a mistake very common in several ancient copies, of which certain of their company were almost idolaters, they followed the oldest blindly.'²⁵ One decisive point that counted against the RV for the Brethren was its translation of 2 Timothy 3.16: 'Every scripture inspired of God is

23. F.F. Bruce, *In Retrospect: In remembrance of things past* (London and Glasgow, 1980), pp.24-5.

24. Kelly, *Day of Atonement*, p.60.

25. *Ibid.*, p.62; the AV translates the verse as: 'Even the righteousness of God, which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe'; the RV omits 'and upon all'. In an interesting example of his Calvinism influencing his textual criticism, Kelly felt that the RV removed from the text the distinction between the free offer of the gospel to all men and the security of the believer. Kelly felt it inconceivable that later copyists would introduce this distinction and therefore, although not found in earlier MSS, must have been in the original.

also profitable...’, which, in the words of Pickering, was felt to be ‘unjustifiable’ as it ‘is open to grave questioning’. ‘For what purpose did the revisers adopt the rendering...?’ he asked.²⁶ Pickering’s London bookshop was selling a work that had no doubt about the translators’ motives. The Seventh-day Adventist scholar, Benjamin Wilkinson in *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (1930) averred that the RV’s translation of the text had followed the Douai version, the Roman Catholic translation which had received its final recension in 1749,²⁷ and that its effect was to suggest that ‘parts of scripture were not inspired’ but that ‘tradition tests the inspiration and gives us the correct meaning.’²⁸ The RV in Wilkinson’s account was animated by an anti-Protestant spirit and was part of the Romanizing tendency of the times.

Wilkinson’s work was central to the arguments in favour of the holding to the AV alone of one Brethren writer, William Hoste, a former Anglican clergyman who was appointed editor of *The Believer’s Magazine* in 1931. In his penny pamphlet *Why I Abide by the Authorized Version* (1935), Hoste admits that he is not ‘an expert textual critic [sic]’, but is ‘a simple juryman’.²⁹ His tract was published by The Bible League, an organisation established to resist attacks on scripture and to defend high views of Biblical inspiration.³⁰ For Hoste, the AV, ‘though of course not perfect’, was translated on more reliable principles, used more reliable manuscripts, and had more reliable men as translators for ‘they had

26. Pickering, *1000 Wonderful Things*, p.122.

27. The Douai version translates 2 Tim. 3.16 as: ‘All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice’. The accompanying notes, however, make it abundantly plain that scripture must be supplemented with Church tradition.

28. Benjamin G. Wilkinson, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* (Washington, 1930), <<http://www.sdadefend.com/MINDEX-Resource%20Library/Our%20Authorized%20Bible%20Vindicated.pdf>>, p.2 [accessed August, 2011]; the evidence for Pickering & Inglis selling Wilkinson’s work is contained in W. Hoste, *Why I Abide by the Authorized Version* (London, n.d.) p, 10, n.1, which cites Wilkinson’s work and gives the London address of Pickering & Inglis’s bookshop for its source, the only work cited by him singled out in this way.

29. Hoste, *Authorized Version*, p.3.

30. <<http://www.bibleleaguetrust.org/index.html>> [accessed August 2009].

eschewed Rome and all its works'.³¹ On the other hand, B.F. Westcott and F.J.A. Hort, the most influential members of the New Testament committee, were 'in full sympathy with the Romanizing movement', and Hoste cites a number of comments from the biographies of both men to establish his point.³² As bad in Hoste's view was 'the scandal of an open Unitarian being invited on to the Committee'³³ and that both Westcott and Hort fully supported the appointment. He cites further examples of the Liberal Christianity of both men, before asking 'Could men so unsound in the fundamentals of the faith... be God's chosen channels for conveying to His Church fresh light on His Holy Word? I find it impossible to believe it.'³⁴ The animus against the RV had evidently been inflamed by the rise of Protestant fundamentalism in the 1920s, and Hoste's attack on the theological Liberalism of the translators, like much of else in his pamphlet, he owes to Wilkinson's book. In language redolent of fundamentalist polemics, Hoste concludes the work with the assertion that 'In contending for the A.V. as a whole, I believe we are 'upholding the ancient land-marks' and are "contending for the faith once delivered to the saints."³⁵

The arguments of Hoste represent a considerable sharpening of the rhetoric, but the consensus among Brethren did not turn completely against the RV. Shortly before Hoste was appointed editor of *The Believer's Magazine*, its publishers, John Ritchie, issued a history of the English Bible, *Through Peril and Flame* (1929), by a non-Brethren writer, J.L. Erck.³⁶ Erck's account of the RV is dispassionate and dismisses the paranoia of it being a

31. Hoste, *Authorized Version*, pp.4-5, 11-13, 15-16.

32. *Ibid.*, pp.16-17.

33. *Ibid.*, p.17; Hoste is referring to Dr G. Vance Smith.

34. *Ibid.*, p.18.

35. *Ibid.*, p.22.

36. J.L. Erck appears to have been a London-based civil servant who worked at the registrar-general's office with responsibility for the registration of buildings for religious purposes. The statement that he was not Brethren is based on the internal evidence of *Through Peril and Flame*, apparently his only book, which passes over Darby's *New Translation*, and is free from both Brethren stylistic mannerisms and theology.

Romanist plot. In his opinion, the RV has ‘a very real value and usefulness, especially for students and preachers’.³⁷ Through its publication by a conservative Brethren publisher, and its usefulness as a Sunday school prize, Erck’s moderate views would percolate through to many Brethren.³⁸ He is even able to allow that the detested translation of 2 Timothy 3.16 is capable of more than one interpretation.³⁹ One noted Brethren Greek scholar, W.E. Vine, had been prepared to go further. In his *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (1923), a work intended to prove the plenary inspiration and infallibility of scripture, Vine maintained, ‘There is really no essential difference between these two versions.’⁴⁰ Later, in his dictionary of New Testament words, he explained the different import of the two translations. The effect of the RV was to refer to the Old Testament and those contemporary documents of the New Testament ‘which were to be accepted by Christians as authoritative’, while the AV ‘states truth concerning the completed Canon of Scripture’.⁴¹ The Brethren, therefore in general, refused to accept the more hysterical reactions to the RV, and it continued to be accepted as worthy of consultation. Henry Pickering summed up the consensus on the RV: ‘there is a mass of useful material of immense value to the student of Holy Scripture.’⁴² As a Brethren teenager it was recommended to me as a very accurate translation, and so I bought a copy in 1968, the year I was received into fellowship in Kirkintilloch.

Nevertheless, in common with other contemporary churches, the Brethren retained the AV for public use. The English of the RV did not have the same power and beauty of the AV. For many the familiarity of the AV would also be an overwhelming argument in

37. Erck, *Peril and Flame*, p.103.

38. The second-hand copy in my possession had been donated as prize for a competition in *The Little One’s Treasury*, a children’s magazine issued by John Ritchie.

39. *Ibid.*

40. W.E. Vine, *The Divine Inspiration of the Bible* (London and Glasgow [1923]), p.45.

41. W.E. Vine, *An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (1940) one-vol. edn (London, 1961), p.329.

42. Pickering, *1000 Wonderful Things*, p.123.

favour of its retention. Doubtless, too, the hostility of Hoste was shared by other Brethren, for the Liberal Christianity of a number of its translators would make many suspicious of it. The same suspicions were to resurface when the New Testament section of the New English Bible (NEB) appeared in 1961, which was the first major Protestant translation to break with the AV sequence. The then editor of *The Believer's Magazine*, Andrew Borland, thought that the new translation shared the theological bias of its translators.⁴³ The AV had also been enhanced for many at the beginning of the twentieth century when it was used by the American Congregationalist Cyrus I. Scofield as the basis of his Scofield Reference Bible (1909) which had found an important link in its being published by OUP in Henry Frowde.⁴⁴ This Bible broke Bishop Bancroft's rule for the translators of the AV to not affix explanatory marginal notes, but as Scofield's enshrined Darybite dispensational premillennialism, this made them entirely acceptable in the eyes of many Brethren.⁴⁵ The Brethren were surely included by F.F. Bruce when he wrote of the AV in his *History of the Bible in English* (1961) that 'it is well recognized that, throughout the English-speaking world, there are hundreds of thousands of readers by whom this version is accepted as "The Word of God" in a sense in which no other version would be so accepted.'⁴⁶ However among the Taylor Exclusive Brethren, Darby's more literal *New Translation* has replaced the AV, and this is one more way by which they mark themselves out as a people apart.⁴⁷ Among the Open Brethren, too, many would cite 'Mr Darby' as offering a superior alternative reading. But until the late twentieth century among the latter, the AV continued its dominance.

43. Editor's note to S. Gilmour, 'The New English Bible', *The Believer's Magazine*, 71. (June, 1961), p.184.

44. Joseph M. Canfield, *The Incredible Scofield and his Book* (Vallecito, CA, 1988), pp.199-200; David Dunlap, 'The origins of the Scofield Reference Bible', <<http://www.plymouthbrethren.org/article/426>> [accessed August 2011].

45. Cf. David J. MacLeod, 'Walter Scott: a link in dispensationalism between Darby and Scofield?', *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1996), pp.155-78.

46. Bruce, *Bible in English*, p.112.

47. Cf. Lindsey Rosa, *Not My Idea of Heaven* (London, 2010), p.3.

AV alternatives

After the 1960s, however, some began to feel that the AV was ready for retirement. Among the Open Brethren there was a greater move generally to make features of assembly life contemporary and to sweep away the older forms which had begun to appear tired and outmoded. Most Brethren readers by then were more concerned with the intelligibility of an English Bible rather than the purity of its underlying Greek text. A serious alternative to the AV offered itself in the Revised Standard Version (RSV), the completed translation of which had appeared in 1952. F.F. Bruce's own preference in a translation was for the principle of dynamic equivalence, in which the sense is rendered in the equivalent receptor idiom and not in a literal fashion as in an exam crib, a preference he demonstrated in his own *Expanded Paraphrases of the Epistles of Paul* (1965).⁴⁸ But he was enthusiastic about the RSV, and had been dismissive of the fresh wave of hysteria which greeted it in the evangelical world, and indeed had some fun at its expense.⁴⁹ He wrote that 'for the English-speaking world as a whole there is no modern version of the Bible which comes so near as the R.S.V. does to making the all-purpose provision which the A.V. made for so many years.'⁵⁰ It would appear that the RSV was finding acceptance in the less traditional Open Brethren assemblies. Bruce, along with Cecil Howley and H.L. Ellison, was an editor of *A New Testament Commentary* (1969), and the RSV was the translation chosen on which to base it, 'since', as Howley wrote, 'this is the English version which is coming to be the most widely accepted throughout the world.'⁵¹ However, the editors had been precipitate. Evangelicals have always been suspicious of any association with Liberal theology, and the feeling that the RSV had not been produced solely by evangelicals made many uneasy

48. Tim Grass, *F.F. Bruce: A Life* (Milton Keynes, 2011), p.64; the analogy is Bruce's own.

49. Bruce, *Bible in English*, pp.194-200.

50. *Ibid.*, p.203.

51. G.C.D. Howley 'Preface', in *idem et al.* (eds), *A New Testament Commentary: based on the Revised Standard Version* (London, 1969), p.6.

with it, a feeling that the Brethren, who as a body tended to be on the conservative wing of evangelicalism, more than shared. The appearance at the end of the 1970s of the New International Version (NIV), a translation that had been made entirely by evangelicals, and which asserted its commitment to ‘the authority and infallibility’ of the Bible,⁵² was therefore the version in modern English for which many had been waiting.⁵³ It was a fresh translation—for example, it did not use archaic pronouns in reference to God—but one that ‘also sought to preserve some measure of continuity with the long tradition of translating the Scriptures into English.’⁵⁴ Although some conservative evangelicals were inevitably critical of it, particularly for its moderate use of dynamic equivalence, its general acceptability to them was seen in its eventual adoption by The Gideons International, a Bible charity in which many Brethren were active. A number of Open Brethren scholars had been involved in the translation process, three of them as members of the Committee on Bible Translation.⁵⁵ This time ‘Brethren’ in its ‘Preface’ did mean ‘ours’. In many assemblies throughout the English-speaking world in the 1980s it swiftly supplanted the AV and any alternative modern versions, and younger Brethren in particular quickly took it to their hearts.

Use of the NIV became one more distinguishing mark of what would come to be called ‘progressive Brethren’. The west of

52. ‘Preface’, *The Holy Bible: New International Version* (1978).

53. The New Testament appeared in 1973, the Old Testament in 1978; it was first published in Britain in 1979.

54. ‘Preface’, NIV.

55. The self-perpetuating Committee on Bible Translation included: W.J. Martin, Rankin Senior Lecturer in Hebrew, University of Liverpool; Alan R. Millard, Rankin Professor of Hebrew and Ancient Semitic Languages, University of Liverpool; D.J. Wiseman, Professor of Assyriology, the University of London; these 3 were also NIV translators and editors, and several other Brethren also acted in this capacity: Murray J. Harris, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Gerald F. Hawthorne, Wheaton College; David Gooding, The Queens College, Belfast; Paul E. Leonard, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; Walter L. Liefeld, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School; there may have been others who are listed as ‘Denominational Affiliation: Unknown’ in ‘The NIV Committee on Bible Translation’ <<http://www.bible-researcher.com/niv-translators.html>> [accessed August 2011].

Scotland assembly of which I was by then a member decided in the mid-1980s to be an AV only one, and banned the public use of the NIV. It was far from being alone in taking this step.⁵⁶ Bible translations became one of the issues around which the evangelical churches (as many now preferred to refer to themselves) and the conservative gospel halls polarised in the later twentieth century.⁵⁷ Sections of the Open Brethren became 'KJV only' assemblies.⁵⁸ Just as the arguments of non-Brethren writers such as Wilkinson and Erck were digested by Brethren readers, so easy access to websites, such as that of the Trinitarian Bible Society,⁵⁹ promoting the *textus receptus* as the best Greek text and the KJV as its most reliable translation, doubtless means that such arguments percolate through to the Brethren, probably more noticeably among North American assemblies, where the KJV only movement is strong.⁶⁰ Such websites, with their allegations of the heretical tendencies of other translations, will have their appeal to the Brethren horror of such an association. There was a similar refusal to surrender the language of the AV in prayer when Brethren in increasing numbers in the late twentieth century ceased using the archaic forms of the second-person singular and verbs agreeing with it. Ironically, the usage of the AV forms had altered from their historical significance by the early seventeenth century. Forms such as 'thee' and 'thy' had been singulars until the previous century, but by the time of the translation

56. The assembly of which I was a member, however, did not go as far as to ban the use of the NIV in the youth fellowship, a concession to the increasing unintelligibility of the AV to a younger generation. One heard of assemblies in this period that had a note pinned to their lectern stating that only the AV should be read from.

57. Cf. Tim Grass, *Gathering to His Name: The story of Open Brethren in Britain and Ireland* (Milton Keynes, 2006), pp.414-31.

58. For the KJV only movement, cf. Campbell, *Bible*, pp.265-8; 'King James only movement', <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_James_Only_movement> [accessed August 2011]; 'Plymouth Brethren' are among the groups listed by Campbell as promoting the movement: Campbell, *Bible*, p.266.

59. <<http://www.trinitarianbiblesociety.org/>> [accessed August 2011].

60. The KJV only movement has recycled many of the arguments promulgated by Wilkinson in *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated* through the writings of the American Baptist pastor, David Otis Fuller.

they were used for distinguishing social relations between speakers, with the singular form being used for inferiors and the plural in talking to superiors. Gordon Campbell gives two possible reasons for the AV using the archaic forms in addressing God. It may have been decided to retain the older usage, or it may have been to reflect the distinction in Hebrew, Greek and Latin between the singular and plural in the second person. The result was, however, that ‘thee’ and its associated forms came to acquire over time their respectful connotation—the opposite of seventeenth-century contemporary usage.⁶¹ There were Brethren who were alarmed at the seeming disrespect of adopting the practice of modern English, which has no distinctions for number or social status. Ernest Wilson, an Irish missionary who had retired to Canada, issued a plea for retaining the AV usage. As a missionary to Angola, Wilson had possessed a superb grasp of the need for contextualisation,⁶² but perhaps like many another expatriate, he found the intervening changes in his own culture difficult to accept. The desire to use the demotic was for him a sign of the times:

Conditions in the world usually have a way of manifesting themselves in the church... It is part of the present day decline in respect, to despise dignitaries and authorities. But if one were to use the language of the street or the market place in addressing a judge while he is presiding in a law court, he would be held in contempt of court, how much more the need for reverence and respect in addressing God, the Creator and Redeemer of the universe!⁶³

Even the retention in the NEB and the RSV of the archaic second person for addressing God did not please Wilson, as these translations used ‘you’ when individuals spoke to the human Jesus, which to Wilson gave the impression the translators were trying to ‘undermine the doctrine of His Deity.’⁶⁴ Adherence to the AV and the use of its archaic language set the user apart from the modern world.

61. Campbell, *Bible*, pp.73-5.

62. Cf. T. Ernest Wilson, *Angola Beloved: A story of God's faithfulness* (1967), 2nd edn (Port Colborne, Canada; 2007).

63. T. Ernest Wilson, *Addressing God in worship and prayer* (n.pl., n.d.), [p.2].

64. *Ibid.*, [p.3].

Yet even among those who adhere to the AV, and *pace* George Higgins, there is an awareness that it is merely a translation. As missionaries, the Brethren were active in producing a number of translations of the Bible into other languages.⁶⁵ Their love of learning meant that the Brethren often wanted to know the original words behind the English, and when they had no Greek, then works such as Vine's dictionary aided them. Even a modern-day Brethren advocate of the AV such as Mark Fenn, an assembly member in Ontario, notes that 'young believers will be exhorted and warned regarding a range of church-related words translated in a certain way in the KJV', and he cites as examples 'bishop', 'deacon' and 'pastor'.⁶⁶ One assumes that the young believers are also implicitly learning that it is a translation they have in their hands, with all the limitations that entails. In other words, now, as in earlier times, there is a refusal to fetishize the AV. But it has undoubtedly been the best-loved English translation in the movement, and it is hard to see modern translations such as the NIV having anything like the hold over the affections of subsequent generations that the AV has had over previous ones. The last word on its enduring use in the Brethren goes to F.F. Bruce: 'its persistence is a tribute to the sound workmanship of the men to whom we owe the version of 1611.'⁶⁷

65. W.T. Stunt *et al.*, *Turning the World Upside Down*, 2nd edn (Bath, 1972), pp.607-13.

66. Mark Fenn, '400 years on, and looking forward: the Authorised (King James) Version', *Precious Seed*, vol. 66 no.1 (February 2011), p.14.

67. Bruce, *Bible in English*, p.203.