

A New Hearing for the AUTHORISED VERSION

by

Theodore P. Letis Ph.D.

Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies

(1978), new edit. 1997. Pages 34.

A Review

by

Dr. Stephen Westcott

Reformation Christian Ministries, BRISTOL

The appearance of a scholarly and yet readable defence of the Authorised Version, in a handy sized but neatly produced booklet, small enough to give away and yet condensed enough to keep on one's shelf as a handy reference must be an event in the Reformed world, and should be hailed by all lovers of the A.V. and the received text. And this is just what Dr. Letis presents us with in this booklet. In fact "A New Hearing" is the second edition, revised, of a work which first saw the light in 1978, and this reviewer was aware of some slight inconsistencies when the 'updating' has not been carried through thoroughly. For example in the 'Introduction' (page 1) we read, "Nevertheless, I have made a comparison of the English Bibles published from 1525 (Tyndale's) to the present, 1978, (New International Version, first edition)..." This gives the booklet a slightly 'outdated' feel (which it does not deserve) and might easily have been avoided by a minor change in phraseology for the new edition. Similar is the statement on p. 29 that "the Gideons still publish the A.V. text as their Bible." But these are minor blemishes, which are of little moment when weighed against the value of the content as a whole.

"Twentieth-century man", Dr. Letis tells us in his **Introduction**, "is a manipulated creature. The merchandisers of the world have conditioned him to believe that he must have variety and multiple choices for everything from toothpaste to grave-stones." And hence, of course, the modern plethora of 'Versions'. ("If you have not seen the one that you like yet, wait awhile; it will arrive".) This Dr. Letis finds intolerable when it comes to the Bible, where the Christian reasonably expects to find a "final authority for all matters of faith and practice". This concern led Dr. Letis to this study, and the booklet contains his conclusions.

We are treated to short and concise chapters as follows:

“The Scrolls and the Parchments”; a damning indictment of Aleph and B, **“The Revised Version of 1881-83”**; the high-jacking of the English Revision Committee by Hort et al.

“Biblical English”; a very helpful discussion of the A.V. as *Biblical* not *Jacobean* English.

“Thees and Thous”: a robust defence demonstrating- with the aid of a simple chart- how these ‘obsolete’ English pronouns take us to the heart of the Hebrew and Greek originals in a way that no ‘modern language’ version can, whilst practical experience shows that ‘English-as-second-language’ students can easily distinguish between ‘you singular’ and ‘you plural’.

“The Language of the People?” shows that this really doesn’t exist, and that versions claiming it have all quickly become ‘dated’. This is a publisher’s ploy because, “Just by publishing a ‘New Bible’ and getting some well known evangelical or academic to endorse it, will insure a considerable profit”.

“Historical Ethos: The Forgotten Factor”; a defence of the scholarship of the A.V. translators, and their situation of working within “a civilization saturated with religion, not with science”.

“The Modern Approach to Translation (Utilitarian)”; ‘Dynamic Equivalence’ translation methods are taken from the secular world, and are part-and-parcel of ‘communication theory’. The main aim is to get across a message, and to do this a strictly literal rendering of the text is optional. This freedom only becomes possible when the Bible is “freed from the influence of the *theory of verbal inspiration*. (Given thus), *Difficulties cease to be formidable*” (cited from Robert Moffatt, 1913). Dr. Letis reminds us that with this liberty it becomes impossible to translate without one’s theological opinions showing through, and we are left wondering, *whose* message will the result be?

“The Renaissance/ Reformational Approach to Translation (Theological)”; In contrast the A.V. is unique “Because the seventeenth-century Anglican divines who produced it held to a high, orthodox view of inspiration, which believed that every word, and even the syntax, was inspired”.

“Historical Cycles and the Modern Situation”; A disturbing and much needed clarion call. We have such downgraded Bibles because persecution has long since ceased to purify the Church, and we are rapidly returning to a ‘pre-reformation’ phase in the cycle of Church history. Who would go to the stake for the N.I.V. or T.E.V.? Or charge into hopelessly one-sided battle joyously singing Psalm 118 in Moffat’s translation? In this section also some of the massive doctrinal changes made by ‘modern versions’ are cited and exposed.

“Summary”; arriving at the conclusion that, “The A.V. or King James Version should be retained in the churches, in Bible studies and in the classroom, because of *the superiority of its Greek text, translation, and English usage*, and because it is a

link with our past as well as a unifying factor for the present.”

It must be pointed out that the author is not one of the school that sees the A.V. as cast in tablets of stone and absolutely beyond improvement. He looks at the “New King James Version” but finds it sadly wanting (not least for “ditching the Tyndalian/Elizabethan second person singular/ plural distinctions”).

Dr. Letis then gives unqualified approval to a version probably better known in the United States than in Britain, in the following terms; “The recent appearance of a masterful updated edition of the classic A.V. ‘The 21st. Century King James Version’ is an exact reproduction of the A.V. with accurate, modern equivalents for all the several archaisms” (p.11). Here is the one place in Dr. Letis’s presentation where we find ourselves sharply dissenting from his opinion. Anyone who examines that version will be at once struck with its distinguishing feature. There are no less than four sizes of typeface scattered throughout this version, roughly intended to indicate text blocks of lesser, middling and greater importance. Thus most of the genealogies of the O. T. are in tiny type face, and the ‘classic’ gospel passages shout out from the page in large black type. The result would be, of course, that if such a version came into general use the small print passages would be consigned, not to the wastebasket, but into general never-read-ness. This is separating between Scripture and Scripture with a vengeance, and making distinctions where God has made none! And who is to say what parts of God’s equally inspired Word is ‘less important’ or gauge what weight of Spiritual matter may lie beneath the surface of the ‘driest’ looking passages? This approach to Scripture is simply unacceptable, and this factor alone should invalidate the ‘21st Century King James Version’ in the eyes of all lovers of God’s Word. Apart from this feature (and certain other small innovations intended for *liturgical* purposes) the ‘improvements’ will be found to be so slight and cosmetic that the reader might as well stick to his A. V. anyway. If Dr. Letis yearns for a conservatively updated and improved A.V. we can wholeheartedly sympathise. That it is to be found here we wholeheartedly disagree, and the implied recommendation of this version seems strangely out of place with the high view of all of Scripture Dr. Letis demonstrates here and in his other writings.

These matters aside, it must be said that this booklet fills a need. There are some elaborate and full length defences of the A.V./ Received text about, and there are a host of short booklets and tracts, the mass of which do not help the cause by their taking a sensational or dogmatic ‘A.V. equals inspiration’ stance. Here is the via media, short, to the point, accurate, convincing, and written by a scholar of international standing and repute. And, finally should this seem a long review for a short booklet (34 pages) I can only plead that it is because there is here so much good matter offered in so little space. The booklet is published by Dr. Letis’ s “Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies” in Philadelphia.