

Chancellor's Lectures 2011

Books that Shook the World - from the *King James Bible* to *Wealth of Nations*

Lecture One, Thursday 5 May

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the first in this year's series of Chancellor's lectures, *Books that Shook the World – from the King James Bible to Wealth of Nations*. If you've come because you'd heard this was a lecture on AV, you're right in a way, but I'm afraid here it stands for Authorised Version (of the Bible, that is) not Alternative Vote – but do stay: there's till plenty of time to vote once I'm finished.

In April 1524, William Tyndale set out from London for Germany. Aged about thirty, from a prosperous Gloucestershire family, he had a great ambition only achievable by fleeing his native land. He expressed this ambition to a learned opponent, as follows: 'If God spare my life, ere many years I will cause a boy that driveth the plough shall know more of the Scripture than thou dost.'

God spared Tyndale's life for a further twelve years. In October 1536, condemned as a heretic, he was strangled at the stake outside Brussels, and his body burned. By then, however, he had translated the whole New Testament, and half the Old Testament, into English. And less than seventy years later, when six translation companies were assembled by King James, they gratefully accepted what Tyndale had bequeathed. Eight or nine tenths of his work found its way into the text of the 1611 King James Bible. It's not an overstatement to say Tyndale gave us the English Bible. The symbolic 'boy that driveth the plough' could indeed now hear the Word of God in his native tongue, and the world was never the same again.

This evening I want to celebrate Tyndale's achievement as a key part of the story of the King James Bible, much celebrated in its 400th anniversary year. There've been many radio and television programmes, books and talks, but none doing full justice to Tyndale's genius. I hope to put that right this evening, and will also pay tribute to Lancelot Andrewes, Bishop of Chichester in the early seventeenth century, given responsibility for translating the opening books of the Bible. Finally, I'll set out something of the impact of the Kings James Bible over the centuries, and we'll see why it's not hyperbole to talk of a mere book as 'shaking the world'. This I hope will prepare the ground for the other explosive books I'll be exploring in the remainder of this year's lectures: Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Darwin's *Origin of the Species*, and Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

Nowadays it may be hard to appreciate how rendering the Bible in English could be controversial. A potted history may help. The original biblical languages are of course Hebrew (the Old Testament) and Greek (the New Testament). In the fourth century, however, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire. A scholarly monk, Jerome, learnt Hebrew and Greek, and translated the Bible into Latin. This translation, known as the Vulgate, dominated the Western Church for a thousand years and more.

In AD 597, Pope Gregory the Great sent Augustine to refound the English Church. Augustine became the first Archbishop of Canterbury, and in the period that followed, individuals such as Caedmon, Bede, Egbert and Aelfric translated parts of the Latin Bible into the vernacular, mainly the Psalms and the Gospels. In 1384 the first complete translation of the Bible in English appeared – the *Wycliffe Bible*. This was named after John Wycliffe, a controversial English reformer who held various posts at Oxford. His followers, often unlicensed preachers, were known as the Lollards. Neither Wycliffe nor his colleagues knew Greek or Hebrew, and so their version was a word for word translation of the Latin of the Vulgate – effectively a translation of a translation. This work was done with an anti-clerical agenda, insisting on the right of everyone to read and interpret the Bible for themselves.

At this time Latin was the language not only of the Bible, but of scholarship. As late as 1605, of the 6000 books in Oxford University Library, only *sixty* were written in English: just 1%. In the preceding centuries to be a scholar and *not* to write in Latin was odd and aroused suspicion, as with Wycliffe, and also (ironically) the anti-Lollard bishop of Chichester, Reginald Pecock. A stained glass window in this Cathedral accurately describes him as the ‘first considerable philosopher to write in English’. This he did in the fourteenth century, trying to persuade Wycliffe’s followers of the error of their ways, before himself falling foul of the ecclesiastical authorities and being condemned as a heretic.

It was in the tradition of Wycliffe and the Lollards that William Tyndale placed himself. He was the first to translate the Bible directly from the original Hebrew and the Greek into English, his groundbreaking New Testament appearing in 1526. More on him, in a moment, after I’ve completed my potted history.

A year before Tyndale died, that is 1535, *Coverdale’s Bible* was printed. This was an official version of the scriptures in English, produced with the approval of the king, and commissioned by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer couldn’t find suitable scholars in England to do the work, so he appealed to the Yorkshire born Miles Coverdale who, like Tyndale, had fled to the continent. Coverdale knew no

Hebrew and only a little Greek, so he relied on the work of others, especially Tyndale and Luther. Of most significance for future translations was his rendering of Hebrew poetry, in particular the Psalms. His version of the Psalms was included in the 1662 Book of Common Prayer.

In 1560 the *Geneva Bible* was produced, dedicated to Elizabeth I and published by a group of exiles living, yes, in Geneva. For the first time a team of scholars worked together from the original languages. Theirs was the first version of the Bible to be divided into verses, and the first to have marginal notes explaining points of method, theology or translation. Other versions from this period include *Matthew's Bible* (1537), *The Great Bible* (1539) and *The Bishop's Bible* (1568).

When James the First commissioned his Bible, it was the *Bishop's Bible*, the work of fourteen bishops nominated by the Archbishop of Canterbury, he instructed to be used as the model. In this he was substantially ignored: Tyndale, by common consent, was the model to follow: both for his mastery of the original languages and his judgement in literary matters.

So then, back to Tyndale. The first official mention of him records his graduation with a Bachelor's degree from Magdalen Hall, Oxford, in 1512. From this is deduced his approximate year of birth, 1494, probably in one of the villages near Dursley in Gloucestershire. He was ordained priest in 1515, the same year he began his Oxford MA. In those days achieving such an MA involved some actual work; in his case it meant for the first time he was able to study theology. He was appalled that such study did not include scripture. John Foxe, the Protestant historian, he of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* (1563), wrote that Tyndale 'read privily to certain students and fellows of Magdalen College some parcel of divinity, instructing them in the knowledge and truth of the scriptures.'

The source and inspiration for these studies was another revolutionary book, *Novum Instrumentum* by the Dutch scholar Erasmus, who only a few years earlier had introduced the teaching of Greek to the University of Cambridge. *Novum Instrumentum* was published in 1516 during the first year of Tyndale's MA. It was a new Latin translation of the New Testament, with, for the first time, *the original Greek text alongside*.

We don't know exactly when Tyndale left Oxford for a post as tutor in the household of Sir John and Lady Walsh at Little Sodbury Manor, back in Gloucestershire. His duties were light, and he used his time to begin to translate from his Greek New Testament into English. Lollardy was strong in Gloucestershire, and Tyndale was a popular preacher. He spoke against the

corruptions of the church, and emphasized scripture for the people. Although such opinions were hardly unique, he was accused of heresy and brought before the chancellor (of the diocese, not the cathedral, I feel I need to add). Tyndale himself later wrote of this stormy meeting: ‘he threatened me grievously, and reviled me, and rated me as though I had been a dog.’ But when the shouting died down, nothing was done.

According to Foxe, Tyndale was warned that if he continued to preach ‘it will cost you your life’. Foxe also records testimony from local man Richard Webb, of Tyndale’s most famous Gloucestershire encounter. Visiting a ‘learned man’, he was told ‘we were better without God’s law than the pope’s’. Tyndale answered, ‘I defy the Pope and all his laws, and ... if God spare my life ere many years, I will cause a boy that driveth the plough, shall know more of Scripture than thou dost.’

Tyndale wanted to print the New Testament in English, and looked to the Bishop of London for support. The Bishop, Cuthbert Tunstall, had been much praised by Erasmus, and so Tyndale was optimistic. He came to London with an employer’s letter of introduction, and a translation from classical Greek to show his facility with languages. This was summer 1523, and Tunstall was busy in parliament, which was in session for the first time in eight years. The Bishop, however, refused to help Tyndale, but didn’t persecute him as he might have done. Tyndale was put up by supporters, particularly the cloth merchant Humphrey Monmouth. From there he accepted invitations to preach, but mainly ‘studied most part of the day and of the night, at his book.’ (Foxe again).

Tyndale realized he wasn’t going to garner official support for an English New Testament, and that it’d be safer for him to continue his work on the continent; hence his departure for Germany in April 1524. The next historical record of Tyndale is in Cologne a year later. His translation of the New Testament was going through the Peter Quentell’s printing press . The authorities got wind of this, however, and raided the printers before the work was done. A long prologue, or introduction, and most of Matthew’s gospel, were safely completed, but no more.

Here, in the so-called ‘Cologne fragment’ are heard for the first time the following words of Jesus: ‘Ask and it shall be given to you: Seek and ye shall find; Knock and it shall be opened unto you.’ The introduction, and the marginal notes to the text, are much influenced by Martin Luther, and in late 1525 Tyndale arrived in the safe Lutheran city of Worms. In 1526 the printer Peter Schoeffer completed the *first ever* English New Testament. This was pocket sized, had no prologue or marginal notes, nor did it mention Tyndale’s name.

This revolutionary little volume was smuggled down the Rhine in bales of cloth, and circulated quickly in both England and Scotland. For the very first time anyone could read the whole New Testament, properly translated from the original Greek, in the English language. Bishop Tunstall of London was not impressed. He warned of ‘in the English tongue that pestiferous and moste pernicious poison dispersed throughout all our dioces of London in great number.’ He arranged for the symbolic burning of Tyndale’s New Testament at St Paul’s, and in May 1527, William Warham, the Archbishop of Canterbury, wrote to all his bishops commending the practice of buying up Tyndale’s work, in order to destroy it.

Unsurprisingly, then, very few copies of the original print run survive, but the legacy and the language lived on, not least the first appearance of phrases such as ‘the spirit is willing’, ‘fight the good fight’ and ‘the powers that be.’

Tyndale’s movements over the next few years are unrecorded. From 1528 onwards, however, all his work was published in Antwerp. It had a number of fine printers, and thriving trade links with England. Tyndale’s most influential book outside his Bible translations, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, came out in October 1528. In it Tyndale drew on all his fluency and passion to castigate the Church for what he saw as its corruptions and superstitions. He accused the Church of ‘selling for money what God in Christ promiseth freely.’ This book was immediately banned and condemned for heresy, but widely read. There is an uncorroborated story that Anne Boleyn showed a copy to her husband to be, who enjoyed it, not least its passages about the supreme authority of the king.

At this time the Hebrew language was almost unknown in England, but increasingly studied on the continent. Somewhere Tyndale learnt it, adding Hebrew to the Greek, Latin, German, Spanish and French he already knew, not to mention English: seven languages in all. Early in 1530 he published the first five books of the Old Testament. Once again, Tyndale had created a first: Hebrew translated into English. The ‘Fiat lux’ of Genesis 1 in Latin became, ‘Let there be light.’

Bishop Tunstall, not satisfied with book burning, encouraged Sir Thomas More to attack Tyndale in writing. More particularly objected to Tyndale’s vocabulary: ‘senior’ or ‘elder’ rather than ‘priest’; ‘congregation’ instead of ‘church’; ‘repent’, not ‘do penance’; and ‘love’ rather than ‘charity.’ When Tyndale defended himself, claiming the authority of the New Testament rather than the church, he seems to have got under More’s skin, to put it mildly. More’s unfinished *Confutation of Tyndale’s Answer* ran to nearly two thousand pages. If you’ve seen *A Man for All Seasons*, and warm to the saintly man of integrity portrayed there, you’ll probably want to stay clear of this rather unhinged work, in which Tyndale is pilloried and

insulted on almost every page. ‘Hell-hound in the kennel of the devil’ and ‘discharging a filthy foam of blasphemies out of his brutish beastly mouth’ are a couple of choice examples.

I’ve not the time to say much more of Tyndale. His story might have ended differently if Thomas Cromwell’s emissary, Stephen Vaughan, had persuaded him to return to England in 1531. Tyndale was loyal to the King, and offered to cease writing, and submit to his authority, if King Henry would only publish an English Bible. But the situation in England was darkening, and nothing came of this.

In 1534 Tyndale revised his New Testament, and it’s this version that provides most of the King James Bible. The British Library contains Anne Boleyn’s own copy, much read by her. By 1535, his Hebrew now excellent, Tyndale had finished translating half of the Old Testament, up to and including the second book of Chronicles. He was living in the English House in Antwerp, the guest of Thomas Poyntz and his wife. In that year, however, he was befriended by a young Englishman in need of money, Henry Phillips. Phillips was a villain through and through, and betrayed him to the authorities.

Tyndale was arrested, held for sixteen months, and tried by no less than seventeen commissioners. As a Lutheran, his crime was heresy. In August 1536 he was condemned and degraded from the priesthood. In October 1536 a stake, brushwood and logs were prepared. A chain was placed around Tyndale’s neck, and he gave the cry that Foxe records: ‘Lord, open the king of England’s eyes’. As a concession to his distinction as a scholar, he was strangled before his body was burnt.

The irony is that within months of Tyndale’s death an English Bible, heavily dependent on Tyndale’s work, was licensed by the king and circulating in England. This was *Matthew’s Bible*, revised as the Great Bible of 1539. The stage was set for the various versions of the next sixty five years, before King James’ translators went back to Tyndale afresh. Tyndale is the unsung hero of the King James Bible, with fine scholarship liberating the original languages into an English plain style, resonant and memorable. He did indeed enable, from 1526 onwards, the ‘boy that driveth the plough’ and many more, to read the Bible in their own language. The country was never the same again.

After the death of Elizabeth I in 1603, King James VI of Scotland took a leisurely and luxurious journey south to take up his throne. Scotland at the time was dominated by Presbyterianism, hostile to anything in the Anglican Church that smacked of Romish influence, hostile to bishops, and suspicious of links between

the king and the church. James considered himself something of a scholar, having studied the Bible in several languages and written religious poetry.

The new king of England, now James I, was not a handsome man. It was said that he ‘waddled like a duck’, and he had over-prominent eyes. He was, however, clever, outspoken and passionate about unity. On his journey south he came to realise just what a religious ferment England was going through. He received a number of co-ordinated petitions from the Puritans, in particularly the ‘Millenary Petition’, signed by a thousand ministers. It called for further reformation of the Church of England – to make it properly Protestant. The King was warned about ‘superstitious ceremonies’ and the ‘tyranny of prelates.’ Said prelates, the bishops of the Church of England, wasted no time in defending themselves, and attacking their opponents.

King James accepted the Puritan idea of a conference to settle matters, although the bishops hated this idea. Delayed by an outbreak of the plague, the conference duly opened at Hampton Court in January 1604. James said he didn’t want the ‘brainsick and heady preachers’ but ‘the learned and grave men of both sides’. So this is what he got: men such as the anti-theatre, anti-bishop Dean of Lincoln, John Reynolds, described as a ‘prodigy in reading, a living library and a walking museum.’ On the other hand there was the Dean of Westminster, soon to be appointed Bishop of Chichester, Lancelot Andrewes, the best preacher and most brilliant man in the English Church, a ceremonialist who opposed Reynolds at every turn.

With the bishops, the King was clever, challenging and rude. When they said the Church of England had done very well for itself, just as it was, for forty years, he rejoined that a man who’d had the poxe for forty years was still in want of a cure. In a discussion of baptism, the bishop of Peterborough referred to an early father of the church who had baptized with sand, not water. The king’s reply is only just repeatable to a pre-watershed audience: ‘a turd for your argument. He might as well have pissed on them, for that had been more liker to water than sand.’

The only consolation for the poor bishop was that James was even harder on the Puritans. He listened carefully to their arguments against infant baptism, confirmation, the wearing of the surplice and kneeling at the Eucharist, before dismissing the lot. The witticism this time is from Lancelot Andrewes: ‘did they think God will have us worship him like elephants, as if we had no joints in our knees?’

James was always likely to favour the established church. He’d loathed the Scottish Presbyterians, and saw that a key advantage of bishops and archbishops was implicit

acceptance of the king as their head. ‘No bishops, no king’, he famously said to John Reynolds. One Puritan suggestion, however, he did accept. During the debates, Reynolds said: ‘May it please your majesty that the Bible be new translated.’ Reynolds didn’t like the royalist *Bishop’s Bible*, and wanted something like the more Calvinist *Geneva Bible*, with its marginal notes explaining points of theology. James liked the idea of a new translation, but as I mentioned earlier, took the opposite view of what should provide the model.

He liked the idea, because he saw in it the possibility of creating something to heal the divisions in both church and country; in the language of the time, an ‘irenicon’, a thing of peace to help build a unifying fabric founded on the divine authority of the king. James therefore closely involved himself in sorting out how the new Bible was to be financed, choosing who would do the work, and defining the principles according to which they would operate.

The new translation was organized with military efficiency. Six companies of eight translators, each overseen by its own director. That’s fifty four people in all. All working according to a set of sixteen instructions. Let me give you a flavour.

First instruction. The Bishop’s Bible to be followed, and ‘as little altered as the truth of the original will permit.’ This is the exception that proves the rule, the only one of the sixteen not obeyed to the letter. *Second instruction.* ‘The names of the prophets and other holy writers to be retained.’ This is an odd one, but the Puritans argued that Scriptural names usually meant something: Adam, for example, meant ‘red earth’; and Timothy, ‘fear God’; and that these meanings should be translated. They named their children in similar fashion. In the Puritan stronghold of Warbleton in Sussex; names such as ‘Eschew-evil’, ‘Give-thanks’, ‘Learn-wisdom’, and (most popular of all) ‘Sin-deny’ were commonplace. James and his Archbishop Richard Bancroft, who issued the instructions, were having none of this nonsense.

Third instruction. The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, with the word ‘church’ preferred to ‘congregation’, ‘priest’ preferred to ‘elder’, etc. Howard Brenton’s play *Anne Boleyn* has an amusing take on this. Slightly inaccurately, in a dramatisation of the Hampton Court conference, he has James stating his preference for the traditional words, *and* his respect for Tyndale’s New Testament. To which Lancelot Andrewes protests: But Tyndale has ‘congregation’, ‘elder and love’ throughout!’ ‘Then re-write him, Dean’, says the King. ‘Rewrite. Make him safe for good Anglicans to read.’

Moving on to *Instruction six*, which forbids marginal notes – the biblical text is to be presented ‘clean’ with no overt ideological emphasis. And then *Instruction eight*,

which says each man in a company will be allocated a certain number of chapters to work on by himself, and then all are to ‘meete together, confer what they have done, and agree for their Parts what shall stand.’ The conferring together including reading proposed passages aloud, surely a key factor in the ‘readability’ of the resulting translation. They worked like this for six whole years.

The first Westminster company of translators was led by Lancelot Andrewes, Dean of Westminster, as I’ve said before, shortly to become Bishop of Chichester. He outdid even Tyndale’s facility with languages, learning no less than fifteen. Amongst them were of course Latin, Greek and Hebrew, but he also knew Syriac and Chaldee. Like Tyndale, he was also an eloquent English stylist, admired by many since, including T.S. Eliot, who famously ‘borrowed’ the opening lines to his poem *Journey of the Magi* from one of Andrewes’ sermons.

For all his gifts, Andrewes didn’t shy from a bit of nepotism, appointing his brother Roger Chancellor of this Cathedral. Not one of my more distinguished predecessors, he was ‘widely loathed’ and eventually received his comeuppance when dismissed as Master of Jesus College Cambridge for stealing college funds.

It was Andrewes who is responsible for the opening words of the Bible, Chapter One of the book of Genesis. Let’s have a look at the first two sentences, to see how he ‘improved’ Tyndale. Tyndale wrote, ‘In the beginning God created heaven and earth.’ Andrewes has, ‘In the beginning God created *the* heaven, and *the* earth’, the additional ‘thes’ derived from the Geneva Bible. Tyndale goes on, ‘And the earth was void and empty, and darkness was upon the deep.’ Andrewes’ wording is longer, ‘And the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep.’ Again he borrows from the Geneva Bible, but ‘*the face* of the deep’ is his own innovation.

This, I hope, gives you a small flavour of the process, and also an indication of the different genius of Tyndale and Andrewes; Tyndale, working without precedent, providing the bedrock and vocabulary; Andrewes, juggling multiple languages, opinions and translations, shaping what Adam Nicolson calls the ‘aural fluency’ and ‘magisterial slowness’ of the King James Bible.

So it was that finally, in 1611, Robert Barker, ‘Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty’ issued the first copies of the new Bible. New it was, but from the first it was designed to have the feel of something ancient. It was laid out in gothic type with ornamental capitals at the beginning of every chapter. To begin with, this rather worked against its widespread acceptance, especially by the Puritans. And then there were the misprints: confusing Jesus with Judas at Matthew 26.36, referring to ‘printers’ rather than ‘princes’ in Psalm 119, and (best of all) omitting

the ‘not’ from Exodus 20.14 so that the seventh commandment read, ‘Thou shalt commit adultery’.

Then there was the political situation. King James I had envisaged his Bible as an ‘irenicon’, bringing peace and unity to a troubled land. His son, Charles I, thought widespread access to an English Bible had encouraged the discontent of his people and encouraged the outbreak of civil war in 1642. Throughout the violence and horrors of the next decade and more, one radical group after another justified their views from the pages of the Bible. Where in the Garden of Eden, for example, were private property and the class system? Property and hierarchy were clearly not part of God’s purposes, suggested groups such as the Diggers, the Ranters and the Levellers, but were a consequence of human sin. They summed up this conviction in a popular rhyme – ‘When Adam dug and Eve span/Who was then the gentleman?’

In both the English Civil War and the American civil rights movement, the King James Bible was an inspiration to those opposing tyrannical authority. In addition to the example just given, appeal could be made to the fiery language of the prophets, or the radical teachings of Jesus. This Bible became the common ground for debate, discussion and action by ordinary people, so helping to lay the foundations for democracy. The irony is that in both England and America, once blood had been spilt, the very same Bible reverted to what James intended to be its natural place: undergirding the ‘powers that be’, a pillar of the establishment. Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, nearly fifty years after first publication, the King James Bible finally began to fulfil this role.

The impact of the KJB in America deserves a lecture to itself. The Pilgrim Fathers, dominated by Puritans, had originally taken the Geneva Bible to America. As they became the new establishment, enforcing the teaching of the Bible in settlements of increasing size and strength, they adopted a new Bible for their new situation – the King James Bible. The language of this same Bible flowed into the spirituals of Afro-American slaves, often drawing on Israel’s experience of liberation from slavery in Egypt, and from there into soul music and the blues.

The cadences of Tyndale, Andrewes and the rest have also fed into famous speechmaking. Martin Luther King in 1963: ‘I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, every hill and valley shall be made low.’ This Isaiah influenced passage went on to quote the prophet directly. And then there is his use of Amos 5.24: ‘No, no, we are not satisfied, and we will not be satisfied until justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream.’

Two years earlier, in his 1961 inauguration address John F. Kennedy spoke of ‘rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation’ (that’s the Epistle to the Romans) and quoted the prophet Isaiah about undoing the heavy burdens, and letting the oppressed go free. Barack Obama, born in the year of Kennedy’s address, delivered his own inauguration speech in January 2009, including these words: ‘We remain a young nation, but in the words of Scripture, the time has come to set aside childish things.’

These are just a few examples of how the voice of the King James Bible became the ruling language of not just one but two world empires. Through the worldwide influence of Britain and America, this voice proclaimed Christianity right across the planet, so that today missionaries from Africa can come to us, reminding us of the riches of faith many seem to want to forget.

Many times this year I have heard lists of phrases from the KJB which have become proverbial, part of ordinary speech. So, it is pointed out, if you have ever gone from strength to strength, escaped by the skin of your teeth, been a thorn in someone’s flesh, got to the root of the matter, set your house in order, been broken hearted, clear-eyed, or your brother’s keeper; if you have ever spoken of ‘filthy lucre’, the ‘apple of his eye’, or ‘flowing with milk and honey’, then you have been living or speaking the language of the King James Bible.

The list of authors explicitly influenced by it is immense, from Shakespeare and Milton to Wordsworth, D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot. But just as important, maybe even more so, was the fact that for generations most ordinary people, as Melvyn Bragg puts it, ‘were fed poetic prose so fine it lasted a lifetime and provided an unmatched set of keys to the word-world.’ This, of course, depended on high church attendance, and schools across the board having daily worship including biblical readings. Such were the social conditions that for a considerable time maximized the impact and effect of the King James Bible. But from the late nineteenth century onwards they applied less and less.

In May 1946 the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland received a proposal for a new translation of the Bible, ‘inasmuch as the language of the Authorized Version, already archaic when it was made, had become even more definitely archaic and less generally understood.’ James I, Scottish through and through, must have turned in his grave. But fifteen years later, in 1961, the *New English Bible* New Testament was published. It was the work of nineteen of the greatest scholars of the time, over thirteen years. Four died before the job was done. The Old Testament took them another nine years.

For all these mighty labours, the King James Bible proved a hard act to follow. Although I have a soft spot for the *New English Bible*, it is little used today. Here in the Cathedral you can hear the KJB at the 8.00am Communion Service every Sunday, but we mainly use the *New Revised Standard Version*, first published in 1989. The introduction to that is worth reading. It pays fulsome tribute to the King James Bible (unlike the introduction to the *New English Bible*) but says the Bible is more than a classic of literature, and its essential message ‘must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning; it must be presented in language that is direct and plain and meaningful to people today.’ It also makes the point that we now have more accurate Greek and Hebrew texts than in the early seventeenth century, and simply know more about the biblical languages than our forebears did.

I may be wrong, but I think the *New Revised Standard Version* will last. And a key reason is that it’s simply more respectful of the King James Bible than most modern translations. The scholarship may have been updated, and the ‘thees’, ‘thous’ and ‘verilys’ replaced, but you can still read of darkness ‘on the face of the deep’, ‘let there be light’, the ‘salt of the earth’, and much more than goes right back to the KJB, and beyond that, to the incomparable William Tyndale himself.

This evening I have said something of the extraordinary impact of the King James Bible. Over the next three Thursdays I will trace its effect on three writers whose most famous books, each in their own way, ‘shook the world’. Mary Wollstonecraft and Adam Smith in the eighteenth century, and Charles Darwin in the nineteenth, all knew the KJB and lived in a world shaped by the faith it articulated. Next week we will see what difference this made to Wollstonecraft’s groundbreaking work of 1792, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Her life story alone is dramatic, scandalous, and poignant. But that is to get ahead of myself. For tonight, thank you very much for your attention.