



Editorial



Nick Spencer

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Welcome to the new look *Transmission*. In recent months Bible Society has gradually introduced a new corporate identity and the change in design of this magazine is part of this process. We hope you like it.

The Bible in Transmission is also featured on our new look website at www.biblesociety.org.uk. You can browse and download, free of charge, previous articles published in *Transmission* by clicking on 'resources' and then 'articles' under the 'format' section on the left of the page.

Next year promises to do unto the Bible what last year did unto Charles Darwin. 2011 marks the 400th anniversary of the publication of the King James Version, arguably the most important and influential book ever published in the English language.

Everyone seems to be queuing up to heap praise on its elegant, memorable language, even those who detest what it stands for. Witness Richard Dawkins telling the 2011 Trust that 'we come from a Christian culture and not to know the King James Bible, is to be in some small way, barbarian'. (Dawkins continues, bizarrely, 'It is important that religion should not be allowed to hijack this cultural resource.' Don't let religion hijack ... *the Bible?*)

The Bible has indeed been a massive 'cultural resource' and this edition of *Transmission* highlights some of the ways in which it has and still does shape our cultural landscape.

The King James Bible may be the focus of next year's celebrations but, as too few people realise, its literary

genius can be traced back to the one of the finest wordsmiths the English language has known. Chris Sunderland takes us back 500 years to a particularly bitter dispute of the early Reformation, one that was central to how the Bible arrived in printed English. On one side was Thomas More, a fine scholar and faithful Catholic, utterly opposed to the new reforming movement and willing to die for his beliefs. On the other was William Tyndale, a linguist of unsurpassed brilliance, responsible more than anyone else for the fact and the sound of the English Bible, and equally willing to die for his reforming commitments. Sunderland tells the story of these two determined men and asks where was Christ in their dispute.

Fr Henry Wansbrough takes a similarly historical look at the topic, telling the story of the relationship between Roman Catholics and the English Bible from its earliest days. Observing '[how] great a part ecclesiastical politics have played in the preference for one biblical translation over another', Wansbrough walks us from the earliest 'Lollard' translations of the fourteenth century, through Tyndale, the Great Bible, the Geneva Bible, the Bishops' Bible and the Rheims-Douai in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, right the way to the Jerusalem and New Jerusalem translations of the twentieth century. Bible translation has always been contentious and often a source of serious division and animosity (witness Tyndale and More). But, Wansbrough concludes, the late twentieth century has witnessed a slow but encouraging convergence in attitudes to the Bible between Protestant and Catholic traditions, which promises fruitful dialogue and even new translations in the twenty-first century.

Steve Holmes analyses how the text of the KJV remains 'an inescapable reference point for British culture', despite the fact that biblical narratives are far less familiar today than at any time since the Reformation. In particular, he looks at how King James' decision to commission and execute the Bible translation in London, Cambridge and Oxford played a key role in standardising the English language. (Protestant nations tended to standardise their vernacular from the bottom-up, usually by means of a particular Bible translation, whereas Catholic ones did so top-down, through the foundation of an 'Academy' to define the language.) The result was a powerful tool for cultural dominance – and marginalisation – within the unifying nation.

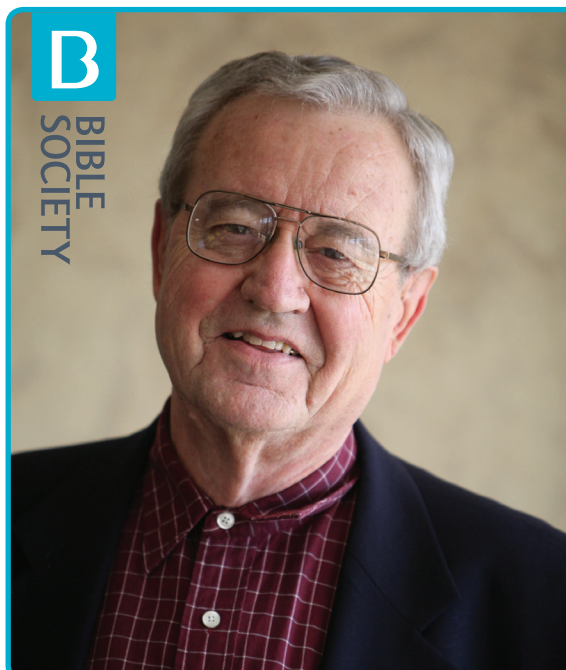
Luke Walton brings us closer to our own time, exploring the continued significance of the Bible in contemporary culture. This is limited not only to the impact of the KJV on English language and literature, but extends in all manner of directions, from the musical creation of the 'do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti' scale to the cinematic genius of J Arthur Rank. He highlights two recent initiatives in this area, linked to the work of the 2011 Trust: the 'Bush Bible', an initiative of the Bush Theatre in London that is seeking to publish a contemporary response to each and every book of the Bible, and 'enter the pitch' (www.enterthepitch.com) which invites film-makers to reframe Scripture as contemporary short film.

Krish Kandiah also dwells on the world of contemporary cinema and, through a helpful four-part analysis, enables us to hear biblical echoes in a wide variety of films. Some are intentional and openly communicate biblical values

or stories, like *The Matrix* trilogy. Some do the same unintentionally, like *Finding Nemo*. Other deliberately invert those values, such as *The Truman Show*, whereas a fourth category do so unintentionally. Overall Kandiah shows how we can 'hear past' the voices that shape our culture, recognising God's authoritative voice in the powerful plots and devices of contemporary cinema, thereby being able to work with them in building bridges with those who might otherwise never come close to a biblical story.

Massive as the Bible's cultural impact has been, it is important not to see it simply as a 'cultural' resource. To that end, Julian Rivers takes a tour of what the Bible has to say about the nature and role of government, taking in a huge amount of ground in the process. The biblical understanding of government, he argues, is that it is legitimate but limited. It should be subject to law and held to account. Its powers should be diffuse and it should reflect a commitment to human equality. It is these contours, Rivers contends, that underpin our own democratic foundations and although the Church's history of political engagement is a chequered one, our current political system is profoundly influenced by the Bible.

We will wait to see if 'the powers that be' expend as much energy in celebrating the 2011 anniversary as they did the 2009 one. We hope that the celebrations will recognise that the reason why the King James Version, like Tyndale's before it, have had such a powerful impact is that their living words point towards the Living Word.



Dallas Willard

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