

FUNDAMENTALISM AND THE KING JAMES VERSION: HOW A VENERABLE ENGLISH TRANSLATION BECAME A LITMUS TEST FOR ORTHODOXY

by
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INTRODUCTION

2011 marks the 400th anniversary of the publication of one of the most important pieces of English literature ever released. Arguably, no other book has had the widespread influence and lasting significance of the King James Version (KJV or AV—Authorized Version) of the English Bible. Its American title is derived from King James (Stuart) the First of England (James VI of Scotland), whose initial idea it was for a new common version, though there is no evidence that he ever *authorized* it for use in English churches during a time of Puritan agitation.² It eventually became the dominant English version and held that position for most of the next three centuries. But with its celebrity status came some interesting history.³ In the late 19th century John William Burgon and some of his associates argued for the KJV against the *Revised Version* not so much because the KJV was a superior English translation but because the underlying Greek text was a better Greek text than the RV used—basically, the Westcott and Hort text.⁴ It is beyond the purview of this essay to discuss these issues per se, though some of the arguments used in this early round of conflict enter into

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²David Bebbington, “The King James Bible in Britain from the Late Eighteenth Century,” Conference on the King James Bible and the World It Made. Baylor University, 2011. For a recent survey of the history of the KJV, see Donald L. Brake and Shelly Beach, *A Visual History of the King James Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2011).

³For recent discussions on the significance of the KJV, see *The King James Bible After 400 Years: Linguistic, Literary, and Cultural Influences*, ed. Hannibal Hamlin and Norman W. Jones (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Gordon Campbell, *Bible: The Story of the King James Version 1611–2011* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); David Crystal, *Beget: The King James Bible and the English Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Leland Ryken, *The Legacy of the King James Bible: Celebrating 400 Years of the Most Influential English Translation* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011).

⁴See [Edward Miller], *The Oxford Debate on Textual Criticism* (London: George Bell, 1897).

the later history that this paper treats.⁵

Since the 1960s, evangelicals or, more specifically, fundamentalists have been debating the continued usefulness of the AV and the underlying Greek text for regular use in the life of the church. Few issues have had the kind of polarizing effect that the battle over Bible versions in general, and the battle for the KJV in particular, have had within some segments of American Protestantism. American Christian fundamentalism⁶ of the twenty-first century has come, in the minds of many, to be closely associated with the “KJV 1611” in such a way that many non-fundamentalists think the movement is cultish, and some lay people within fundamentalism itself think that God is the one who personally “authorized” the KJV as *the* Bible for the English-speaking world. The development of this view has taken place over the past half century initially in response to liberalizing tendencies within American Protestantism. Later influences within broader evangelicalism, including egalitarianism, helped to bolster the supremacy of the KJV as *the* divinely-approved Bible, not only for the English speaking world, but even to be used as a translation aid for rendering the Bible into other languages.

⁵For a discussion of the early history of the debate for the superiority of the Majority Text, see Daniel B. Wallace, “The Majority-Text Theory: History, Methods and Critique,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 37 (June 1994): 185–215 and idem, “Historical Revisionism and the Majority Text Theory: The Cases of F. H. A. Scrivener and Herman C. Hoskier,” *New Testament Studies* 41 (April 1995): 280–85. Also see Gordon D. Fee, “Modern Textual Criticism and the Revival of the *Textus Receptus*,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 21 (March 1978): 19–33.

⁶The term “fundamentalism” has a narrow and a broad meaning. In the broadest sense, it is used to describe any religious movement that stresses strict adherence to a core set of beliefs, usually found in its sacred writings. Whether one speaks of Muslim, Hindu, or Christian fundamentalism or even Mormon fundamentalism, this broad sense of the term is used. For an overview of this wider usage, see *Fundamentalisms Observed*, ed. Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

The use of the term for this essay will be used in its more historic and narrow sense, to refer to the movement in twentieth century American Protestantism that began to emerge in the later part of the nineteenth century as a response to the rise of theological liberalism. The term “fundamentalist” likely arose from the publication of *The Fundamentals*, issued at the expense of Lyman (1840–1923) and Milton Stewart (1838–1923), between 1910 and 1915. See Edward B. Pollard, “Baptists and Fundamentalism,” *Homiletic Review* 87 (April 1924): 265. These were a series of twelve booklets containing ninety essays by sixty-four authors, scholarly and irenic in nature, articulating historic doctrines of the Christian faith. Hundreds of thousands of copies were distributed worldwide.

Numerous general works chronicle and evaluate fundamentalism. See George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870–1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), which offers helpful background history for the broad fundamentalist movement, tracing its roots to the confluence of competing theological and cultural views, including rising liberalism, Scottish Common Sense Realism, popular D. L. Moody style evangelism, the Holiness movement, and Millenarianism. Also, see Douglas W. Frank, *Less Than Conquerors—How Evangelicals Entered the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986).

This essay will set forth the broad contours of the history of the “KJV-only” movement, discussing some of its most colorful characters and peculiar views.⁷ The struggle for the KJV includes a debate over textual critical matters, with some preferring the KJV to modern versions because the KJV comes from the Majority Text. However, most⁸ who adhere to a KJV-only position do so out of a belief that in this version alone, God has preserved His Word, inerrant and infallible, for modern English readers. For this large host of Christians, the use of the “King James 1611” (as opposed to “corruptions” of the KJV, including the *New King James Version* and even the *New Scofield Reference Bible*, which updated certain words within the text, rendering it a “corruption” of the original KJV) has become *the* litmus test for Christian orthodoxy.⁹ The sign of a biblical church becomes the Bible version used from the pulpit. Churches, colleges, mission agencies, etc., proudly notify their constituency that they are committed to the “KJV 1611.”¹⁰

The defense of the KJV takes two approaches. Some argue that the 1611 KJV is the most accurate rendering of the original manuscripts for the English-speaking world. Others are more dogmatic.¹¹ The KJV is the *perfect* Word of God able even to correct Greek and Hebrew manuscripts themselves.¹² Both of these views will be examined in this

⁷By “KJV-only movement” I mean those who believe that the King James Bible is *the* Word of God—inerrant and infallible—for the English-speaking world.

⁸It is always difficult to demonstrate that “most” people do anything. How does one prove this? That this is an intensely personal discussion for me will become apparent below. I use the term “most” because of thirty years of experience in and around this movement in two countries. I think that I can say with certainty “most,” but I admit it would be difficult to prove.

⁹Few KJV-only proponents seem to realize that the KJV has had a robust textual revision history of its own since 1611. These revisions are well documented in David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

¹⁰“For English-speaking people, the Authorized Version of the English Bible, commonly called the King James Version (KJV), is the only accurate, modern English translation of the preserved original language texts and is the Word of God in English for English-speaking people” (“Articles of Faith,” Bible Baptist Church, Nashua, NH, http://bbcn.org/pdfs/BBC_Articles_of_Faith.pdf [accessed 1 April 2011]). Statements of this nature could be multiplied many times over.

¹¹“The KJV or Authorized Version is the most complete, accurate and faithful translation of the original texts. With the KJV the reader will not be confounded or deceived in matters of doctrine needful for salvation and spiritual growth” (Timothy Tow and Jeffrey Khoo, *A Theology for Every Christian* [Singapore: Far East Bible College, 1998], p. 122).

¹²“There **MUST** be a final authority; somewhere that one can have **absolute confidence** he will find **every** word of God perfectly preserved, so he can have an opportunity to live by those words as God said he should. *That one place, that final authority, that complete text with all God’s individual words is the KJV 1611*” (Roy Branson, *KJV 1611: Perfect!* [Bristol, TN: Landmark Publication, n.d.], p. 77 [emphasis in the original]).

essay, for in reality, there is very little difference in the kinds of arguments used for either view.

A PERSONAL NOTE

This is an intensely personal issue for me. I grew up in a mainline church with little awareness of the Bible, despite being baptized as an infant, confirmed, serving as an altar boy, and singing in the church choir. I remember little of my childhood church life except for a distinct recollection of the sermon preached the Sunday after either Martin Luther King, Jr. or Robert Kennedy was assassinated. The minister preached on gun control. I suppose I remember this distinctly because, like many boys my age, I liked to play with toy guns!

In any case, I never heard teaching using a Bible until my teenage years when I began attending a Southern Baptist Church in the early 1970s. The minister used the KJV, as many conservative churches of that generation did, although in the youth group, many of us carried *The Living Bible*. As I was completing my senior year in high school I met a young man who invited me to attend a college recruitment meeting for his school that, as it turned out, was a fundamentalist college. I had little idea who the Southern Baptists were in the summer of 1974, much less what fundamentalism was, but at that summer college meeting, I was impressed with the college's president and the vision for Christian training that he put forth, so I decided to attend that college in the fall of 1974, rather than a secular university as I had intended.

My academic direction immediately shifted from a study of wildlife conservation to preparation for the ministry. At that Bible college, I was exposed to fundamentalist views of theology, but in the Bible classes the professors freely used either their Greek New Testaments or the KJV. The Greek text we used was the UBS 2nd edition rather than the *Textus Receptus*. Within a couple of years, the *New American Standard Version*, which had been published shortly before I enrolled and was sold in the campus bookstore, became popular. Both faculty and students bought and used the NASB. We still memorized from the KJV as a standard text but without any sense of its superiority. It was simply a matter of consistency across the student body.

It was during these days of preparation that the issue of Bible translations became a controversial one among fundamentalists. Although there had been a number of modern versions published within the past one hundred years, it was three versions in particular that seemed to cause concern—the NASB (1963/71), the *Living Bible* (1962/1971) and the *New International Version* (1973/78). *The Living Bible* was intensely popular in the mid-1960s because the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association received permission to print 50,000 copies of *Living Letters*, the first portion to be released to the public. However, as the NASB was the “most literal” of the recent modern versions, it was the preferred choice for those of us studying the Bible in the 1970s.

At the same time one of my professors began to tell us in class that he had become the object of repeated attacks in a local-church newspaper for his use of modern versions. It was the first any of us had heard of the brewing controversy. In time it would grow from small isolated attacks to a united effort to champion the “KJV 1611”!

By the end of the 1970s I was looking toward marriage and was dating a young lady at a rural church in North Carolina. Her father, a godly but uneducated layman, loved his Bible and read it regularly. It was beginning to look like the girl and I might have a future together. One Sunday we were visiting at the pastor’s home and there was another guest present, a man, whose name I have long forgotten, but who had a nickname—“Mr. King James.” Apparently he was in the vanguard of the growing army of defenders of the “1611.” At lunch that day, quite naively on my part, I allowed myself to be drawn into a rather excited discussion on Bible versions. I took the side in favor of modern translations as I had been taught in college. I thought nothing of the conversation when it ended as a stalemate, but my young lady friend recounted the story to her father who suggested to her that perhaps she should not continue the relationship with me because of my weak view of the Bible. Moreover, since she was the church pianist, borrowed from another church, her father wanted her to come back to his church rather than attend a church where a man who denied the Bible was working. The pastor of the church I was working in called me at home later that week and rather sheepishly told what had happened and informed me that, while he understood my views and knew I loved God and the Bible and was no heretic, it was in everyone’s best interest if I simply stopped working in his church! Within a few short days, I had lost both my almost-fiancée and my church ministry, all because I held a defective view of the KJV!

There simply is not time to rehearse the rest of my struggles with supporters of the KJV, but suffice it to say that I have been in fundamentalism, in and around the KJV-only segment for more than thirty years. Though I was almost convinced of a form of the position in the mid-1980s, I hold to both the use of modern versions and the critical text that underlies them. However, the narrower KJV-only view of the Bible has given occasion for many on the outside of fundamentalism to malign the movement as a whole.

MOVING TOWARD KJV-ONLYISM

Because of the populist nature of the KJV-only movement within fundamentalism, it is not easy to determine when this movement began to surface within the large and rather amorphous movement of self-identified fundamentalists.¹³ No single academic institution seems

¹³No attempt will be made to chart the landscape of fundamentalism. That is well beyond the scope of this essay. It is sufficient to note that with respect to the KJV, there are some self-identified fundamentalists who take a strong view of the KJV and others, who though they may appreciate the KJV at some level, prefer to use modern transla-

to have initially championed this position. Moreover, when examining fundamentalist institutions, among the older institutions still adhering to their heritage, there is a mixture among the alumni with prominent defenders of the KJV-only position and prominent rejecters of the position from the various schools.¹⁴ For example, among the alumni of the institution where I teach, there are published proponents on both sides of the debate.¹⁵ Additionally, the first fundamentalist school I attended also had well-known and published advocates on each side of the debate.¹⁶

tions. It is simply reductionist to equate fundamentalism with a particular Bible version.

¹⁴For an early fundamentalist rejection of KJV-onlyism, see Robert L. Sumner, "Bible Translations," *The Biblical Evangelist*, January 1979.

¹⁵Central Baptist Theological Seminary of Minneapolis began in 1956 after the seminary at Northwestern Schools closed. Dr. Richard V. Clearwaters, its founder, was decidedly not committed to the KJV-only position and it was never taught in the classrooms of the seminary. Nevertheless, three alumni have become spokesmen in some wings of KJV-only fundamentalism. Charles Surret, who earned his M.Div. at Central, today teaches at Ambassador Baptist College in Lattimore, NC, and has contributed to the pro-KJV position with *Which Greek Text? The Debate Among Fundamentalists* (Kings Mountain, NC: Surret Family Publications, 1999). David H. Sorenson earned the M.Div. in 1972 at Central and yet adopted a KJV-only position. See David H. Sorenson, *Touch Not the Unclean Thing: The Text Issue and Separation* (Duluth, MN: Northstar Baptist Ministries, 2001). Most well known among Central alumni for defending the KJV is Dell Johnson (M.Div. 1970, Th.M. 1974, Th.D. 1982), former professor at Pensacola Christian College, who was featured in a series of videos produced by the college defending the KJV. See *The Bible...Preserved from Satan's Attack* (Pensacola, FL: Pensacola Christian College, 1996); *The Bible...The Text Is the Issue* (PCC, 1997); and *The Leaven of Fundamentalism* (PCC, 1998). Opposing the KJV-only view among the alumni is W. Edward Glenny (M.Div. 1976 and Th.M. 1982), who earned a Ph.D. at Dallas Theological Seminary. Glenny along with his colleague Roy E. Beacham (M.Div. 1976, Th.M. 1983; Th.D. from Grace Theological Seminary) and several other Central Seminary alumni/professors collaborated to produce *The Bible Version Debate: The Perspective of Central Baptist Theological Seminary* (Minneapolis, MN: Central Baptist Theological Seminary, 1997). Central Seminary professors produced a second rejection of the KJV-only view in 2001. See *One Bible Only: Examining Exclusive Claims for the King James Bible*, ed. Roy E. Beacham and Kevin T. Bauder (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2001).

Central Seminary is by no means alone in this mixed historical record. Both Tennessee Temple University of Chattanooga, TN, and Bob Jones University of Greenville, SC, have had graduates or professors on both sides of the issue, though neither school has officially taught the KJV-only position. For TTU see James D. Price, *King James Onlyism: A New Sect* (self published, 2006). Price, though not an alumnus, has impressive academic credentials. He has a Ph.D. in Hebrew and Biblical Literature from Dropsie College for Hebrew and Cognate Languages and served on the editorial committees of both of the *New King James Version* and the *Holman Christian Standard Version*. Price taught at TTU for 33 years. One of the most prominent graduates of TTU defending the KJV is David W. Cloud (b. 1949), a graduate of TTU in the late 1970s. A few months after his conversion (1973), he entered TTU and soon began *Way of Life Literature*. He has a widely disseminated web newsletter that often defends the KJV. He also has published *For the Love of the Bible: The Battle for the King James* (Oak Harbor, WA; *Way of Life Literature*, 1995).

¹⁶I studied under Stewart Custer, Chairman of the Bible department and professor of Greek at Bob Jones University in Greenville, SC. He was repeatedly attacked by

Forerunners of the KJV-Only Movement

Historian and opponent of the KJV-only movement Doug Kutilek suggests that the fountainhead for the modern emphasis on the KJV can be traced to an insignificant publication by a Seventh-Day Adventist, Benjamin G. Wilkinson, in 1930.¹⁷ Wilkinson's book was among a small number of books that were written to object to the *Revised Version* (1881) and its American cousin, the *American Standard Version* (ASV, 1901). Though Seventh-Day Adventists are not considered a part of the fundamentalist tribe, Benjamin Wilkinson's book, *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*, did come to the attention of a Baptist Bible teacher in Oregon, Jasper J. Ray, who took up the defense of the KJV twenty-five years later in the book *God Wrote Only One Bible*.¹⁸ Ray plagiarized heavily from Wilkinson, though he did not acknowledge his debt to him in his book.¹⁹ Ray soon became aware of a more sophisticated defense of the KJV by a recent Harvard University Th.D. graduate Edward F. Hills. Hills had done his dissertation on textual criticism²⁰ and, in 1956, produced the first edition of his *The King James Version Defended*.²¹ The essence of Hills's argument was that God has providentially preserved his word and therefore, the Scriptures should be treated in a way quite unlike all other ancient texts. According to Hills,

God's preservation of the New Testament text was not miraculous but providential. The scribes and printers who produced the copies of the New Testament Scriptures and the true believers who read and cherished them were not inspired but God-guided. Hence there are some New Testament passages in which the true reading cannot be determined with absolute certainty....

In other words, God does not reveal every truth with equal clarity. In biblical textual criticism, as in every other department of knowledge, there are still some details in regard to which we must be content to remain uncertain, but the special providence of God has kept these uncertainties down to a *minimum*. Hence if we believe in the special

another alumnus, Peter Ruckman, pastor of Bible Baptist Church of Pensacola, FL. See Peter S. Ruckman, *Custer's Last Stand* (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1981).

¹⁷Doug Kutilek, "The Background and Origin of the Version Debate," in *One Bible Only*, p. 44.

¹⁸Jasper J. Ray, *God Wrote Only One Bible* (Eugene, OR: Eye Opener Publishers, 1955).

¹⁹The details of this may be found in Gary Hudson, "The Real 'Eye Opener,'" *Baptist Biblical Heritage* (Spring 1991): 1-4.

²⁰Edward F. Hills, "The Caesarean Family of New Testament Manuscripts" (Th.D. diss., Harvard University, 1946).

²¹*The King James Version Defended: A Christian View of the New Testament Manuscripts*, 4th ed. (Des Moines, IA: Christian Research Press, 1984). The first edition of 158 pages was published in 1956 and had grown to 280 pages by the 4th edition.

providential preservation of the Scriptures and make this the leading principle of our biblical textual criticism, we obtain *maximum certainty*, all the certainty that any mere man can obtain, all the certainty that we need. For we are led by the logic of faith to the Masoretic Hebrew text, to the New Testament Textus Receptus, and to the King James Version.²²

Hills cited Kirsopp Lake (1872–1946) and John William Burgon (1813–1888), Dean of Chichester Cathedral, who both suggested that the reasons why there was a paucity of Byzantine manuscripts of an early date was that either the scribes destroyed the exemplars when they were done using them or the earlier versions of these manuscripts simply were worn out and did not survive. The older extant manuscripts that have survived to this day did so because “they were rejected by the Church and not read or copied but allowed to rest relatively undisturbed on the library shelves of ancient monasteries.”²³

It seems likely that the issue that drove both Ray and Hills was the then recently published *Revised Standard Version*, which was completed in 1952.²⁴ Before that time, though there had been numerous attempts to update the language of the KJV, these were largely unsuccessful from a populist standpoint.²⁵ But the RSV was a serious attempt to challenge the popularity of the KJV by updating the language and reflecting modern textual critical theories in some of the disputed passages.²⁶ The influence of Hills’s works may be seen in the heavy dependence that later KJV defenders such as David O. Fuller (1903–1988) and Peter S. Ruckman (b. 1921) made of his writings in their early defenses of the KJV.²⁷

²²Ibid., p. 224.

²³Ibid., p. 186. See also Kirsopp Lake, et al., “The Caesarean Text of the Gospel of Mark,” *Harvard Theological Review* 21 (October 1928): 349; and John William Burgon, *The Revision Revised* (reprint ed.; Paradise, PA: Conservative Classics, n. d.), p. 319. Burgon went so far as to suggest that Vaticanus and Sinaiticus “are indebted for their preservation *solely to their ascertained evil character*” (ibid., emphasis in the original).

²⁴Chapter four of Ray’s book (esp. pp. 73–83) targets the RSV in a way that suggests this was the initial point of concern that caused Ray to write the book. For Hills’s comments on modern English versions, especially the RSV and NEB, see Hills, *The King James Version Defended*, pp. 226–29. “The modernism of the RSV and the NEB appears everywhere in them” (p. 226).

²⁵On the history of English Bibles, see Jack P. Lewis, *The English Bible from KJV to NIV: A History and Evaluation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) and Bruce M. Metzger, *The Bible in Translation: Ancient and English Versions* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

²⁶For a general discussion on the early struggles over English versions before the rise of the KJV-only movement, see Peter J. Thuesen, *In Discordance with the Scriptures: American Protestant Battles over Translating the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²⁷*The Christian’s Handbook of Manuscript Evidence* (Pensacola, FL: Bible Baptist Bookstore, 1970). Note especially the endnotes, pp. 173–222. Ruckman acknowledges Ray’s booklet in the “Preface,” but it is Hills’s influence that can be seen in the notes,

The Battle for the King James Version

Undoubtedly the two most important champions of the KJV among the fundamentalists were David Fuller and Peter Ruckman. Fuller was converted in a J. Wilbur Chapman evangelistic meeting in 1916 and was baptized by prominent New York fundamentalist pastor Isaac Massey Haldeman. After graduation from both Wheaton College and Princeton Seminary, he entered into the fundamental Baptist ministry, succeeding early fundamentalist Oliver W. Van Osdel at the influential Wealthy Street Baptist Church of Grand Rapids, Michigan. Van Osdel was an early separatist, leaving the Northern Baptist Convention well before the formation of the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches (GARBC) in 1932.²⁸ He eventually joined that group of separatists and became one of their most influential pastors, serving on its first council of fourteen in 1938. Fuller's contribution to the rise of the KJV-only position came in 1970 with the publication of *Which Bible?* However, Fuller did not always embrace a position espousing the superiority of the KJV.

In 1932, Fuller carried on correspondence with Edgar J. Goodspeed (1871–1962), the well-known Chairman of the Department of New Testament and Early Christian Literature at the University of Chicago. Goodspeed was a noted theological liberal who was involved in Bible translation himself. The subject of the correspondence had to do not with the use of the KJV per se but the personal beliefs of Goodspeed regarding major Christian doctrines—the Virgin Birth, the deity of Christ, the atoning death and bodily resurrection of Christ—and apparently Goodspeed's fitness to translate the Scriptures. In the course of the correspondence, and apparently in response to something Goodspeed had written to Fuller, Fuller indicated that he “preferred” the King James Version “from the standpoint of the beauty of the language. I realize that it is not as accurate as the Revised but the accuracy does not extend to the doctrine but merely to the clearness of the thought expressed. All of the versions I believe [*sic*] were verbally inspired, in the original manuscripts.”²⁹ In a follow-up letter to Goodspeed's reply, he quoted the above citation again to emphasize that the

doubtless because Ruckman is attempting to deal with issues of Greek text rather than Bible translations per se. For evidence of Ruckman's dependence of Ray, see *The Bible Babel* (Pensacola, FL: Pensacola Bible Press, 1964). A review of this booklet may be found in Z. C. Hodges, review of *The Bible Babel* in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 124 (October 1967): 361–62.

²⁸On Van Osdel, see Kevin T. Bauder, “Biography of Oliver W. Van Osdel” (Th.M. thesis, Denver Baptist Theological Seminary, 1983). On the GARBC, see Kent Berghuis, “The GARBC as Heir to the Baptist Bible Union: A Case Study in 20th Century Fundamentalism” (paper read at the Evangelical Theological Society annual meeting, Toronto, Canada, November 2002), <http://www.reclaimingthemind.org/papers/ets/2002/Berghuis/Berghuis.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2011).

²⁹David O. Fuller to Edgar J. Goodspeed, 4 May 1932 (copy in my possession).

issue was not a new translation as such but the faith of the translator. Fuller implied that one who denied the essential claims of Christianity could not render an accurate translation from a doctrinal standpoint.³⁰

It was apparently this latter belief that caused Fuller to embrace a strong KJV position in *Which Bible?* nearly forty years later. “Now many new translations demand recognition and prominence—the Revised Version, the American Standard Version, the Revised Standard Version, the New English Bible, the Knox Version, the Anchor Version, the Berkley Version, etc., etc.” Fuller showed his indebtedness to J. J. Ray, citing him sympathetically. Fuller held that “there have been many attempts to adulterate and to destroy the Holy Scriptures.” Following Ray’s argument and that of Edward F. Hills, Fuller believed that the “god of this world” was attacking “first the person and work of the Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word” and secondly assailing “the integrity and accuracy of the written Word of God—the Bible.” “From the beginning there has been no pause in the assault on God’s Son and on God’s Word.” This led Fuller to believe that in order to protect the Scripture for future generations of Christians, “there has been a gracious exercise of Divine providence in its [the Bible’s] preservation and transmission.”³¹

The preservation that Fuller believed to have taken place, he took from the writing of Hills.³² Fuller cited Hills who himself had cited J. W. Burgon.

For the providence of God was watching over this sacred text even during the first three centuries of the Christian era. Even during this troubled period a sufficient number of trustworthy copies of the New Testament Scriptures were produced by true believers under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. These were the manuscripts to which the whole Greek Church returned during the fourth and fifth centuries, again under the leading of the Holy Spirit, and from which the Byzantine text was derived.³³

Which Bible? was a compilation of articles from a variety of authors, living and dead, some of which were in print in other places, that attempted to prove Fuller’s views stated in the introduction. Significant is the fact that Fuller reproduced much of the earlier work of Wilkinson that lay behind Ray’s book, omitting the fact that Wilkinson was a Seventh-Day Adventist, describing him merely as a man “all but unknown to the world of scholarship” who “taught for many years at a small and obscure Eastern college.”³⁴ Fuller sought to demonstrate

³⁰David O. Fuller to Edgar J. Goodspeed, 27 May 1932 (copy in my possession).

³¹See David O. Fuller, “Why This Book?” in *Which Bible?* 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publications, 1972), pp. 5–6.

³²Ibid., pp. 6–7.

³³Ibid., p. 8.

³⁴Fuller, “About the Author of *Our Authorized Bible Vindicated*,” in *Which Bible?* p. 174.

the superiority of the KJV by citing Terrance Brown, then director of the Trinitarian Bible Society, who wrote on the character to the KJV translators. He then reproduced an article by Robert Dick Wilson showing the destructive nature of higher criticism. Fuller offered an article that championed the *Textus Receptus* and tried to show the deficiencies of the Westcott-Hort theories of textual criticism. These kinds of arguments became standard fare in pro-KJV literature following Fuller, but usually with much less sophistication.³⁵

Fuller championed this view to the end of his days and it affected numerous relationships.³⁶ He had graduated from Wheaton in 1925 and would eventually serve on its board for forty years. That relationship came to an end in 1974, however, due to the perceived drift at Wheaton, as evidenced, Fuller believed, by their openness to certain modern versions like the *New English Bible* and *Good News for Modern Man*.³⁷

It is difficult to determine the precise influence of Fuller's book, but it is clear that it played a significant role in the lives of others who subsequently embraced the "KJV 1611." Sorenson, for example, notes:

In the early 1980s, a pastor friend gave me a book written by David Otis Fuller entitled *Which Bible?* I received it with skepticism. It cut across the grain of everything I had been taught in seminary on the issue of Bible translations. However, as I read what Fuller wrote, I came to understand that there were two Greek texts.³⁸

Yet for all the rhetoric that Fuller could muster, the General Association of Regular Baptist Churches, the fundamentalist fellowship with which Fuller was associated all of his life, never embraced his narrow view of the KJV, though through most of its history the KJV was the Bible that its churches regularly used. In 1961 Charles T. Butrin published a critique of several of the more recent modern versions with recommendations on their usefulness for the churches. He believed that "Americans [were] singularly blessed to have so many versions of the Scripture." The versions were evaluated for readability as well as

³⁵A more recent defense of the KJV that uses similar arguments is William P. Grady, *Final Authority: A Christian Guide to the King James Version* (Knoxville, TN: Grady Publications, 1993). The goal of Grady's book is to "help dispel [the] confusion [of multiple modern version] by presenting a logical, documented argument for the King James Bible as being *the* true Word of God for English-speaking people" (p. v).

³⁶He also contributed two additional books to the KJV-only discussion: *True or False? The Westcott and Hort Theory Examined*, ed. David O. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publishers, 1973) and *Counterfeit or Genuine: Mark 16? John 8?* ed. David O. Fuller (Grand Rapids: Grand Rapids International Publishers, 1975). This final work was dedicated to Jasper J. Ray, "whose book *God Wrote Only One Bible* moved [him] to begin this fascinating, faith-inspiring study."

³⁷See resignation letter from David O. Fuller to the Wheaton president Hudson T. Armeding, 16 September 1974. A copy may be found in the files of the General Association of Regular Baptists, Schaumburg, IL.

³⁸Sorenson, *Touch Not the Unclean Thing*, p. 5.

faithfulness to the message of the text. The author noted that some of the versions held a liberal bias, but he did not dismiss the use of modern versions out of hand nor did he show the undue deference for the KJV that would later characterize a hyper-fundamentalist wing of the movement.³⁹ This non-KJV-only view has continued to be the normative position of the GARBC as a fellowship, despite some of its individual pastors who have dissented.⁴⁰

To be sure, Fuller's book appears more scholarly and sophisticated than many of the subsequent defenses of the KJV. Fuller himself apparently had a working knowledge of Greek and Hebrew, unlike many modern defenders of the KJV.⁴¹ He also attempted to maintain a higher level of Christian civility in his defense of the KJV. I once wrote to Fuller about the caustic nature of the debate that drew a response of

³⁹Though many have come to identify the KJV with fundamentalism, I have elsewhere suggested that a belief in the KJV as *the* Bible of fundamentalism and that without this one cannot claim the title *fundamentalist* is, in fact, a position of *hyper-fundamentalism*, which I define as anyone who adds to the essential core of historic beliefs that have ordinarily constituted fundamentalism (Jeff Straub, "The Fundamentalist Challenge: Does Fundamentalism Have a Future?" Bible Faculty Leadership Summit, Faith Baptist Bible College, Ankeny, IA, July 31, 2009).

For Butrin's articles, see Charles T. Butrin, "Modern Versions," *Baptist Bulletin*, March 1961, pp. 8–9 and idem, "Modern English Versions, Pt. 2," *Baptist Bulletin*, April 1961, pp. 23–24; idem, "Modern English Versions, Pt. 3," *Baptist Bulletin*, May 1961, pp. 25–26; and idem, "Modern English Versions, Pt. 4," *Baptist Bulletin*, June 1961, pp. 25–27.

⁴⁰See H. O. Van Gilder, "Is Your Bible Inspired?" *Baptist Bulletin*, February 1972, pp. 14–15. Van Gilder, at the time, former national representative for the GARBC, recommended for study purposes the use of a good modern version like the ASV 1901 or the NASB (ibid., p. 15). Also L. Duane Brown, "Evaluating and Appreciating the King James Version," *Baptist Bulletin*, July/August 1974, pp. 8–11. While Brown demonstrated the historic value of the KJV, he also showed some of its weaknesses and suggested that modern versions were useful for Bible study. He still encouraged the continued use of the KJV as a public pulpit Bible. Also William Arp, "The Process of Bible Translation," *Baptist Bulletin*, July 2000, pp. 23–26. Arp summarizes his view: "It seems that the Scriptures do not teach explicitly that God will preserve His Word in either a single manuscript family or a single manuscript" (p. 26).

⁴¹See for example, G. A. Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions: An Exhaustive Documentation Exposing the Message, Men and Manuscripts Moving Mankind to Antichrist's One World Religion* (Munroe Falls, OH: A.V. Publications, 1993). A former college English professor at Kent State, Riplinger has no training in theology, biblical language, or textual criticism. Her book arose out of her experience counseling her Christian students, whom she found could not be comforted because they were using modern versions with important verses allegedly left out. An opportunity to study the issue of modern versions presented itself when Riplinger became disabled. She used her time (six years) to collate the various versions and discover these discrepancies for herself and believes that the abbreviated Bibles are a part of a satanic conspiracy to "infiltrate" evangelical churches, "gradually changing the bible to conform its One World Religion," (p. 1). Riplinger's defense of the KJV is not based on an analysis of textual issues per se, though she does attempt to interact with those issues toward the end of the book (esp. pp. 467–556). Biographical information on Riplinger is scarce. YouTube has a series of videos of her appearing on *Action Sixties* with Herman Bailey out of Clearwater, FL, from which details of her life may be gleaned. See <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j-wZaGEDqpo&NR=1> (accessed 30 March 2011).

lament from him especially with respect to another well-known early champion of the KJV, Peter S. Ruckman.

Peter Ruckman began writing about the KJV in the early 1960s. Ruckman was converted to a fundamentalist version of Christianity in 1949 after considering Zen Buddhism and Roman Catholicism. Having already earned his B.A. from the University of Alabama, he enrolled in Bob Jones University of Greenville, South Carolina, where he completed requirements for the M.A. and Ph.D. in four years.⁴² He went on to pastor Brent Baptist Church of Pensacola but after tension in the church arose over his second marriage, his first wife having filed for divorce in 1962 before he became a Christian, the church apparently split. Ruckman then started Bible Baptist Church of Pensacola in 1974 with seventeen people where he remains the pastor.⁴³

In 1965, Ruckman started the Pensacola Bible Institute and began to promote the KJV as the exclusive Bible for the English-speaking world. Eventually he would author several books on the issue and begin a monthly church newspaper the *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, from whose pages he would launch fusillades of invective against those who refused to accept the AV as the "infallible living word of the Living God." His primary targets were fundamentalists who refused to adopt his narrow views.⁴⁴ Ruckman became so prominent in the Bible translation issue that the movement often carries his name. To be a "Ruckmanite" in some corners of the KJV-only discussion is a rather pejorative term. Pro-KJV advocate David Cloud goes to great lengths to distance himself from what he considers the false teaching of Peter Ruckman, as does Donald A. Waite, another strong advocate of the KJV position.⁴⁵ California fundamentalist pastor R. L. Hymers considered "Ruckmanism" cultic and a "demonic doctrine which is shaking the very foundations of fundamentalism at this hour."⁴⁶

In some ways, it may be unfair to consider Peter Ruckman in a contemporary treatment on the KJV and fundamentalism since

⁴²"About Dr. Ruckman," <http://www.KJV1611.org/aboutusdruckman.html> (accessed 26 March 2011).

⁴³David Cloud, "What about Peter Ruckman?" Way of Life Literature. <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/ruckman.html> (accessed 26 March 2011). Cloud, an opponent of Ruckman's extreme form of KJV-only, nevertheless, is an ardent supporter of the KJV-only position. See David Cloud, *For the Love of the Bible*, rev. ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Way of Life Literature, 1995).

⁴⁴Peter Ruckman, "From the Desk of Dr. Ruckman" *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, 5 May 1978, p. 2. Ruckman stated that he had held this view from the moment of his conversion on March 4, 1949.

⁴⁵Cloud, "What about Peter Ruckman?" See also Jeffrey Khoo, "Non Ruckmanite Answers to AntiKJV Questions," Bible for Today, <http://www.biblefortoday.org/articles/answers.htm> (accessed 30 March 2011).

⁴⁶R. L. Hymers, *The Ruckman Conspiracy* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1989). See also Gary R. Hudson, *Why I Left Ruckmanism* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1988).

Ruckman himself is the object of significant criticism by many fundamentalists on both sides of the KJV debate. Moreover, he attacks many fundamentalists for their views on Bible versions, including some KJV advocates who do not go far enough in their defense of the KJV. Early in the publication of his monthly paper, *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, he promised to run a series of forty articles documenting the history of "the Alexandrian cult," which had "duped" many fundamentalists. In these articles he attacked many well-known fundamentalist schools that did not hold the line on the use of the KJV. Bob Jones University and members of its faculty often were castigated in Ruckman's diatribes.⁴⁷ And yet, despite his regular assaults on well-known fundamentalists, he received support from other prominent fundamentalist men, either directly within the pages of his paper or via pulpit affiliation. Material from David O. Fuller appeared in the first issue of the paper.⁴⁸ Ruckman also ran a piece by Fuller that had appeared in another independent Baptist paper, *The Projector*, edited by Dayton Hobbs of Milton, Florida. In the article, Fuller was defending the inerrancy of the KJV. Lester Roloff (1914–1982) and Ruckman appeared together at the "King James Bible Believer's Conference" in October 1978 in Livonia, Michigan. The conference was promoted in the *Bible Believer's Bulletin*.⁴⁹ Roloff, who was raised and educated a Texas Southern Baptist, attending Baylor University and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary the 1930s, broke with the convention over denominationalism, becoming an independent, fundamentalist Baptist. Roloff travelled widely in fundamentalist circles despite his affiliation with Ruckman and stood firmly for the KJV.⁵⁰ An article by another well-known fundamentalist defender of the KJV, David Cloud (b. 1949), appeared in the *Bible Believer's Bulletin*. Cloud had grown up in a Christian home but turned away from God as a teenager. He started to drink and served in Vietnam, becoming a drug user there. Cloud returned home, and after briefly considering Hinduism, was converted in 1973. He enrolled in Tennessee Temple University and soon started the Way of Life Literature ministry. Part of Cloud's testimony appeared in Ruckman's paper, along with his condemnation of rock and roll music.⁵¹ Although many in fundamentalism dislike the

⁴⁷The first article in this series may be found in Peter S. Ruckman, "Fundamentalists Being Duped by the Alexandrian Cult," *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, July 1978.

⁴⁸See "On Your Guard," an excerpt from a pamphlet by David O. Fuller, *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, May 1978.

⁴⁹See "King James Bible Conference," *Bible Believer's Bulletin*, September 1978.

⁵⁰Roloff spoke in chapel at BJU when I was a student and commented once that when it came to the Bible, "We don't need to rewrite it, we need to reread it!" Biographical information on Roloff may be found at "Lester Roloff," *The Sword of the Lord*, <http://www.swordofthelord.com/biographies/rolofflester.htm> (accessed 30 March 2011). Also see "About Our Ministry," Roloff Evangelistic Enterprises, <http://roloff.nextmeta.com/content.cfm?id=294> (accessed 30 March 2011).

⁵¹See David Cloud, "Mom and Dad Sleep While Children Rock in Satan's

extreme rhetoric of Ruckman, and Ruckman often levels his literary guns at his fellow fundamentalists, he stills merits treatment in this discussion, though he clearly manifests a hyper-fundamentalist position.

It would take an essay of considerable length to treat in detail the peculiar views of Ruckman regarding the KJV. Many of his views are idiosyncratic with regard to the general teaching of most KJV proponents. For example, Ruckman believes that “the A. V. 1611” sometimes is “superior to *any* Greek text.” That is, when there is a discrepancy between the KJV and the manuscripts, even the *Textus Receptus*, then the KJV should be considered authoritative.⁵² What this does is make the “mistakes” in the KJV a form of “advanced revelation!”⁵³ Ruckman believes this because he holds that the KJV was “given by inspiration of God.”⁵⁴ It is for reasons like this that many defenders of the KJV among the fundamentalists distance themselves from the extreme teachings of Peter Ruckman.

A secondary issue among the fundamentalist KJV proponents who break with Ruckman is his excessively strident rhetoric. He is often acerbic in his comments. For example, the NIV is referred to as the “Nutty Idiot’s Version.” He refers to “this jackass, jackleg, jack rabbit, jackanapes ‘ORIGINAL GREEK’ – ‘God AIDS Abraham’s seed.’ Where did it come from? Well bless your ever lovin’, cotton-pickin’, blue-eyed world, darling...”⁵⁵ His language is colorful, strident, and often excessive, even for the most ardent KJV-only supporters.

Ruckman stills pastors in Pensacola and promotes the KJV. But his influence among mainstream fundamentalism and even among the KJV-only wing of fundamentalism has greatly diminished over the years.

Contemporary Combatants

The battle for the KJV has now been raging in fundamentalism for more than forty years. Despite numerous attempts by more sober-minded and linguistically trained fundamentalists to answer the charges and accusations of some of the most vociferous advocates of the KJV-only movement,⁵⁶ there remains a robust, if narrow

Cradle,” *Bible Believer’s Bulletin*, February 1979.

⁵²Ruckman, *The Christian’s Handbook of Manuscript Evidence*, p. 118.

⁵³Ibid., p. 126.

⁵⁴Quoted in Cloud, “What About Ruckman?”

⁵⁵See “Peter S. Ruckman, “Correcting the ‘Original’ Greek with the English,” *Bible Believer’s Bulletin*, January 2006, <http://www.KJV1611.org/BBB/2006/jan-06.pdf> (accessed 30 March 2011).

⁵⁶Numerous examples could be cited of fundamentalists who have attempted to refute the KJV advocates without utterly rejecting the historic value of the King James Version. Many love the translation for its English prose, but they recognize that it is not the only Bible that is useful to English speakers and many regularly use a modern

sub-culture within fundamentalism that identifies itself with KJV-onlyism.

Several contemporary examples could be cited. In 1996, Dell Johnson preached several chapel messages at Pensacola Christian College (no connection with Peter Ruckman) on the superiority of the KJV. The chapel messages were videotaped and mailed to fundamentalist pastors far and wide. Additional messages in subsequent years were delivered at Pensacola, also videotaped and mailed around the world.⁵⁷ In the second series, Theodore Letis (1951–2005) and Michael Bates joined Johnson in condemning the use of modern versions. Letis had a Ph.D. in Ecclesiastical History from the University of Edinburgh.⁵⁸ While Letis was not actually a fundamentalist, nevertheless, he and Johnson held to similar views on the issues of Bible versions. In fact Letis wrote the preface for the fourth edition of Edward Hills's *The King James Defended* (1984). He also contributed two books to the Majority Text debate, which is a subcategory of the KJV-only movement.⁵⁹

Because Letis was not a fundamentalist, his use to promote an otherwise perceived fundamentalist issue soon created dissension among fundamentalist, pro-KJV-only advocates. David Cloud called him “a new evangelical,” a term Cloud uses very imprecisely, and castigated Pensacola for using him to defend the KJV. Moreover, Cloud pointed out that Letis actually seemed to oppose much in fundamentalism. “If Theodore Letis is a friend of fundamental Baptists, they need no enemies!”⁶⁰ Johnson, on the other hand, was a graduate of fundamentalist

version. See *From the Mind of God to the Mind of Man: A Laymen's Guide to How We Got Our Bible*, ed. James B. Williams (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 1999) and *God's Word in Our Hands: The Bible Preserved for Us*, ed. James B. Williams (Greenville, SC: Ambassador-Emerald, 2003). Also William Combs, “Erasmus and the Textus Receptus,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Spring 1996): 35–53; idem, “The Preface to the King James and the King James-Only Position,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 1 (Fall 1996): 253–67; idem, “Errors in the King James Version,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 4 (Fall 1999): 151–64; idem, “the Preservation of Scripture” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 2000): 3–44.

Moreover, fundamentalists are not alone in trying to refute this error. Cf. D. A. Carson, *The King James Version Debate: A Plea for Realism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979) and James R. White, *The King James Version Only Controversy: Can You Trust Modern Translations?* 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2009).

⁵⁷See footnote 15 above for details.

⁵⁸See obituary in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, 27 June 2005, <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/atlanta/obituary.aspx?page=lifestory&cpid=14394095> (accessed 4 April 2011).

⁵⁹See Theodore P. Letis, *The Majority Text: Essays and Reviews in the Continuing Debate* (Grand Rapids: Institute for Biblical Textual Studies, 1987) and idem, *The Ecclesiastical Text: Text Criticism, Biblical Authority and the Popular Mind* (Philadelphia: Institute for Renaissance and Reformation Biblical Studies, 1997).

⁶⁰David Cloud, “Theodore Letis: A Friend of Fundamental Baptists?” 8 April 1999, Way of Life Literature, http://www.theonemediator.com/KJV_FILES/014-KJV_Defense_Library.pdf (accessed 4 April 2011).

seminary Central Baptist in Minneapolis and had taught in several fundamentalist schools before going to Pensacola. But he was untrained in the scholarly disciplines of Greek and Hebrew and textual criticism beyond a rudimentary level. He has since left the employ of Pensacola Christian College.

The Johnson/Letis videos were answered by a group of fundamentalist educators who produced a video response, *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*. On the video were theologians, New Testament scholars, and other men who gave a reasoned answer to the Pensacola position. Fundamentalist schools like Bob Jones University, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary, Maranatha Baptist Bible College, Clearwater Christian College, Northland Baptist Bible College, and Calvary Baptist Seminary sought to present a united response to the hyper-fundamentalism of the Pensacola videos. They argued against the KJV being a test of orthodoxy both necessarily and historically and demonstrated how many well-known fundamentalist leaders of the past used modern versions.⁶¹

Another interesting book to influence the fundamentalist debate on Bible versions is G. (Gail) A. Riplinger's *New Age Bible Versions*.⁶² This book sought to discredit the modern versions by a "guilt by association" method of critique. Her lengthy screed is a classic illustration in the use of *non sequitur* argumentation. The book is filled with assertions and out-and-out misinformation on the connection between many modern translations and the new age movement. There are plenty of quotes from new age writers but there is no apparent connection between their beliefs and the connection that Riplinger says exists.⁶³

Riplinger, like Letis, has also fallen out of favor among many fundamentalists due to her unusual associations, shrill tone, and dubious background. One of the early criticisms came from her failure to use her full name on the book but rather simply "G. A. Riplinger." She is reported to have suggested that God gave her the details of the book miraculously. Therefore she signed the book "G. A. Riplinger" to

⁶¹See *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, Coalition for the Defense of the Scriptures (Allen Park, MI, 1998).

⁶²Since the publications of *New Age Bible Versions*, several other books have been published by Riplinger. See Gail Riplinger, *Which Bible Is God's Word?* (Oklahoma City, OK: Hearthstone Publishing, 1994) and idem, *The Language of the King James Bible* (Aravat, VA: AV Publications, 1998). She goes so far as to argue that even the spelling of the words in the KJV should not be tampered with. She has a lengthy list of words in the KJV with the letter *I* in the middle of the word—both Saviour and Lucifer have *I* in the center. This shows, according to Riplinger, how Satan attempts to counterfeit Christ (*Language of the King James Bible*, pp. 85–89).

⁶³For reviews of her book see Sam Schnaiter, review of *New Age Bible Versions*, by G. A. Riplinger, *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 2 (Fall 1997):105–26; Robert L. Thomas, review of *New Age Bible Versions*, by G. A. Riplinger, *The Master's Seminary Journal* 5 (Fall 1994): 228–32; and H. Wayne House, review of *New Age Bible Versions*, by G. A. Riplinger, *Christian Research Journal* 17 (Fall 1994): 46–48.

signify that the book was written by “God and Riplinger.”⁶⁴ Questions of her marital status began to surface in recent years. She had maintained among her fundamentalist constituency that she was married only once, but documents began to circulate that in fact she had been married three times. This discrepancy put her credibility in serious jeopardy. When asked for clarification, she was, apparently, not forthcoming and actually lied to conceal her marital history. Therefore, many former friends have withdrawn their endorsement of her literature.⁶⁵

One of the most prolific pamphleteers and lecturers of KJV-onlyism is Donald A. Waite. He is currently the president The Dean Burgon Society and The Bible for Today. The BFT is a literature ministry that offers hundreds of pamphlets, books, recorded sermons and lectures, etc., to the fundamentalist world, with many of these sources dealing with the KJV. Waite himself is among the more educated men in fundamentalism with two earned doctorates, a Th.D. in Bible Exposition from Dallas Theological Seminary in 1955 and a Ph.D. in speech from Purdue in 1961. Waite, like David Cloud, is a more temperate proponent of KJV-onlyism. While he argues unrelentingly for his narrow view, he does not resort to *ad hominem* arguments typical of Peter Ruckman.

Among the early influences on Waite was J. J. Ray’s *God Wrote Only One Bible*. He also came across an early copy of Fuller *Which Bible?* as well as copies of J. W. Burgon’s material from the Shelton College library. He also had a copy of Edward Hills’s *Believing Bible Study*. By 1971, he

became deeply convicted and convinced that the King James Bible and the Greek text that underlies it, as well as the Hebrew text—although [he] got into the Hebrew text a little bit later—but [he] was convinced that the Greek text that underlies the New Testament of the King James Bible was the accurate text to use.⁶⁶

Waite’s most thorough treatment of his KJV views may be found in his *Defending the King James Bible* (2nd ed., 1996). He argued that the KJV is superior to modern versions for four reasons: it used a better Greek text (the *Textus Receptus*), the translators of the KJV were better men than modern translators (in the sense of being devout and orthodox), the translation technique used by the KJV was better (Waite

⁶⁴Lim Seng Hoo, “Gail Riplinger, Prophetess of KJVO-VPP (Verbal Plenary Preservation), Exposed,” <http://www.truth.sg/Gail%20Riplinger%20Prophetess%20of%20KJVO-VPP%20Exposed.pdf> (accessed 4 April 2011).

⁶⁵See David Cloud, “Gail Riplinger Lies to Dr. and Mrs. D. A. Waite,” *Way of Life Literature*, <http://www.wayoflife.org/files/8de87995956f5b3436295a15442c1b8f465.html> (accessed 4 April 2011).

⁶⁶David Cloud, “Testimonies of KJV Defenders—Dr. Donald Waite,” *Way of Life Literature*, 2004, <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/waite.html> (accessed 5 April 2011).

opposes dynamic equivalence), and the theology of the KJV is better than modern versions. Waite argues, for example that the bibliology of the KJV is better because it includes the longer ending of Mark.⁶⁷ Waite has also produced a number of other books and booklets discussing various aspects of KJV-onlyism.⁶⁸

William Grady is a more recent example of a defender of the KJV. He is currently the pastor of Macedonia Baptist Church of Swartz Creek, MI, and has self-published two books defending the KJV. Grady testifies that the Lord “opened my eyes to the King James Bible in 1988 after reading *The Christian’s Handbook of Manuscript Evidence*.”⁶⁹ Grady’s initial burden was to demonstrate, contra many fundamentalists, that the belief in the KJV was necessary. “Because *today’s* conservative is surrounded by literally dozens of ‘perversions,’ *unlike the time of Burgon*, he *must* hold to *one* Book and *one* Book *alone* for matters of final authority.”⁷⁰ First among his arguments against modern fundamentalist scholarship is that the men who held to modern versions were not “soul-winners.” What the connection between evangelism and textual criticism was Grady did not say, nor did he offer evidence that these men were, in fact, not interested in evangelism, except to say: “Frankly speaking, the Greek scholar J. Gresham Machen never warranted the police protection afforded the uneducated, controversial Billy Sunday.”⁷¹

Many KJV-only fundamentalists have rejected Grady’s extreme views. In 2005, Grady was invited to preach in chapel at Crown College in Powell, Tennessee.⁷² He was also invited to preach the following Sunday night at the host church, Temple Baptist Church, pastored by Clarence Sexton. In that chapel message, Grady called for a renewal of Ruckmanism. This caused Sexton to disinvite him from the previously scheduled Sunday night follow-up message at the church. Grady,

⁶⁷Waite, *Defending the King James Bible*, p. 139.

⁶⁸Cf. D. A. Waite, *Dean Burgon Society Deserves Its Name: Ten Reasons Why* (Collingswood, NJ: Dean Burgon Society, 2001); idem, *Fundamentalist Distortions on Bible Versions* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1999); and idem, *Central Seminary Refuted on Bible Versions* (Collingswood, NJ: Bible for Today, 1999).

⁶⁹William P. Grady, *Given By Inspiration: A Multifaceted Study on the A.V. 1611 with Contemporary Analysis* (Swartz Creek, MI: Grady Publications, 2010), p. ix.

⁷⁰Grady, *Final Authority*, p. x (emphasis in the original).

⁷¹Ibid., p. viii.

⁷²“Shibboleth: Sevens Signs of the Pseudo-King James Onlyism,” 16 September 2005, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w_RJdKxvmi8 (accessed 6 April 2011). In the introduction to the sermon, Grady gives his testimony. He indicates he was raised as a Roman Catholic and became a fundamentalist Christian in 1974 through the preaching of Oliver B. Greene, a radio evangelist from Greenville, SC. At the end of the sermon, Sexton, obviously disquieted by what he had heard, attempted to mitigate some of the more extreme statements, including the implication that God had killed Theodore Letis for criticizing the King James Bible! Grady has since called attention to the “apostasy” at Crown. See “More Apostasy at Crown College,” <http://www.gradypublications.com/more-apostasy-at-crown-college.htm> (accessed 6 April 2011).

in his controversial sermon, went so far as to disassociate himself from fundamentalism, arguing that fundamentalists did not believe enough of the essential doctrinal truths such as the infallibility of the English Bible.

Grady's recently published a second book expanding on the "Pseudo King James Onlyites," whom he defined as those "who promote the KJV in public while accepting the *Textus Receptus* as the higher authority in private."⁷³ What vexes him is that "nearly every Bible college in the Fundamentalist orbit pursues this duplicitous strategy."⁷⁴ Moreover, Grady judges that "all 'Pseudo King James Onlyites' are driven by a fleshy desire to appear scholarly and intellectual."⁷⁵ Grady's goal is to expose those weak KJV-only men and to validate the inspiration of the KJV. Often in his sights is Hyles-Anderson College, his alma mater, and Jack Schaap, son-in-law of the deceased former pastor Jack Hyles and current chancellor of the college. Hyles had been his pastor and had endorsed the first book, *Final Authority*. Hyles attempted to defend his use of the KJV by the use of logic.⁷⁶ Grady wanted to set the record straight. He believed that even Jack Hyles, his former pastor, had contributed to the pseudo KJV-only movement. Grady embraces some of Ruckman's rhetoric, calling fundamentalists who do not agree with him "pinheads."⁷⁷

The list of other widely known KJV-onlyites could be expanded further but there is no need at this time to pursue this. There has been sufficient treatment of most of the major proponents to draw some general conclusions.

A CRITICAL EVALUATION

First, it should be noted that belief in the superiority of the KJV is a relatively new position in fundamentalist circles and goes well beyond the historic tenets of fundamentalism. Fundamentalism has always been concerned with the Word of God as the final authority, but that authority was never vested in a particular Bible translation. It is true that much of fundamentalism has used and appreciated the KJV as a generally accurate rendering of the Greek and Hebrew in English. As modern versions proliferated, some called attention to dangerous trends by theological liberals to mute key Bible doctrines, but never discounted the value of modern versions themselves. Despite efforts by KJV defenders to find historical antecedents in earlier fundamentalism

⁷³Grady, *Given By Inspiration*, p. 42.

⁷⁴Ibid.

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 43.

⁷⁶Hyles preached a sermon 8 April 1984 entitled "Logic Must Prove the King James Bible," available from <http://www.biblebelievers.com/Hyles1.html> (accessed 23 August 2011).

⁷⁷Grady recounting of the Sexton conflict may be found in *Given By Inspiration*, pp. 41–52. The "pinhead" comment is on p. 48.

who appeared to champion the KJV, the movement itself began in earnest in the latter half of the twentieth century and really did not gain any significant momentum until the mid-1970s. It was during this decade that Peter Ruckman began his paper *Bible Believer's Bulletin* that did much to advertise KJV-onlyism. Of course today, the Internet gives one the sense that fundamentalism is filled with KJV-onlyism. Anyone with a personal computer can start a web site and promote any view he or she chooses. But fundamentalism has no official spokesmen and despite the widespread acceptance of the KJV among some segments of self-identified fundamentalism, KJV-onlyism has never been in the mainstream of the movement. Therefore it is rightly called hyper-fundamentalism. Its proponents add belief in the supremacy and/or the inspiration of the KJV to long-held and widely agreed upon lists of historic doctrinal beliefs. But many self-professing fundamentalists today reject the necessity of the KJV as an English translation, or even the superiority of the Majority Text position, for which others argue.⁷⁸

Second, even from this brief survey of the contours of the KJV-only landscape, it is clear that there is no unified movement. There are nearly as many variations of the position as there are men and women who have written to defend the KJV. The earliest endorsees—Wilkinson and Hills—were in no sense fundamentalists. David O. Fuller was among the most sophisticated of the genuine fundamentalists to hold this view. He maintained that the KJV was the best translation from the best manuscripts. Peter Ruckman and William Grady are among the most extreme, arguing that the KJV is inspired and can be used to correct the Greek and Hebrew manuscripts. Gail Riplinger is among the most idiosyncratic, arguing that the modern versions come from New Age influences. She is also among the most mystical, suggesting that even the spelling of the KJV words themselves cannot be changed lest one tampers with some divinely appointed illustration. David Cloud tries to strike a more sane approach, rejecting the excesses, the shrill voices, and many of the doctrinal aberrations. But he fails to understand that his own uninformed and prejudicial views on textual criticism render his criticisms equally invalid. Donald Waite, while having an interesting academic background, really is not equipped to handle the textual issues involved in the manuscript evidence.⁷⁹ In the end, the KJV-only position is seriously divided and often spends as much energy attacking variations within the position as

⁷⁸It has been my experience over thirty years that in the final analysis, despite the fact that many KJV-only men try valiantly to maintain that the debate is ultimately about the Greek text underlying the English version, most of these same men would never agree to a new English rendering of the Bible, even from the *Textus Receptus*.

⁷⁹I have purposefully avoided entering into this discussion at this level for the same reason. While I have a working knowledge of the biblical languages and am familiar with text critical theories, I write as a historian. I leave the technical analysis to others more competent to judge.

opponents outside the position. Many KJV-only folks are professing fundamentalists who attack other professing fundamentalists!

This diversity leads to a third observation. Few men or women in the movement have the academic training to speak to the issues involved with the textual critical matters. This is not universally true and there are some men who muster more sophisticated articulations of a pro-KJV-onlyism. Edward Hills is the most articulate. Charles Surret and Thomas Strouse make an attempt to ground their arguments in real textual critical issues.⁸⁰ But generally, defenses of the KJV are confusing, poorly written, and weakly argued. The defenses offer unsophisticated arguments designed to stir up the passions of the uninformed Christian who loves his Bible but does not have the education to see through the confusing rhetoric and misinformation.⁸¹ The mere threat of someone “taking away my Bible” is enough to make many Christians fear. To be sure, all Bible translation involves a measure of interpretation and one’s theological disposition does affect how one renders the text. This was the point Fuller made in his early correspondence with Edgar Goodspeed. But how far can this be carried forward? Westcott and Hort are often demonized in KJV-only literature for their Anglican sensibilities, but they came from the same basic theological tradition as that of the translators of the KJV.

A fourth observation is that there does not appear to be any realistic hope that the KJV-only position will die out any time in the near future. If anything, the Internet has made the dissemination of even

⁸⁰Strouse has published a number of books that attempt to set forth a more erudite approach to the KJV. See David Cloud, “Testimonies of KJV Defenders—Thomas Strouse,” *Way of Life Literature*, 2004, <http://www.wayoflife.org/database/strouse.html> (accessed 4 April 2011). Strouse has written a number of papers also on the issues. See the following link for a list and details: <http://www.emmanuel-newington.org/seminary/resources/index.php> (accessed 4 April 2011).

⁸¹An example of misinformation is Mickey R. Carter, *Things That Are Different Are Not the Same* (Haines City, FL: Landmark Press, 1993). “Many foreign nations have the Bible in their own language, and many of these are translations made directly from the King James Version. Missionaries have translated the King James Version more than any other version. It has been the standard to translate the King James Version into other languages” (*ibid.*, p. 84).

My seminary (see note 1) has a branch campus in Romania. Our director, a Romanian pastor in Arad since the days of communism, first became acquainted with American fundamentalists after the 1989 fall of Nicolae Ceausescu. He had learned to speak English by watching American movies and was recruited to help a group of Americans retranslate the Bible into Romanian. When he found out that they wanted to translate the KJV into Romanian, he walked away from the silly idea. I have also heard of an attempt to translate the KJV into French by some French Canadians influenced by the KJV-only movement as well as an attempt to produce a KJV Spanish edition. I am also aware of efforts to try and “fix” certain foreign versions to make them closer to the TR or MT positions, but I cannot find any legitimate, significant foreign rendering of the KJV, though perhaps there are some. Cf. Peter Heisey, “The Need to Revise the Cornilescu Romanian Bible,” *Bible for Today*, 2006, http://www.biblefortoday.org/ForeignBibles/romanian_bible.htm (accessed 4 April 2011). The goal of this later effort is to revise the existing Romanian version not according to the KJV, but according to the TR.

the most extreme forms of KJV-onlyism accessible to a worldwide audience, not simply in printed form but in the availability of venues like YouTube where sermons can be uploaded and shared with anyone who has an Internet connection. This may give the illusion to some that the KJV-only influence in fundamentalism is wider than it actually is. To be sure, there are plenty of individuals who profess to be fundamentalists who hold to a strong KJV position. But at the same time, there is a strong opposition to the movement being co-opted by hyper-fundamentalism. Happily for Oxford, Cambridge, Thomas Nelson, and any number of other printers of King James Bibles, this will likely insure a ready market for years to come.

One final observation is in order. Those who champion the KJV as the only legitimate translation of the English Bible fail to grasp the essential nature of Christianity. From its inception, Christianity was a “translated religion.”⁸² “Translation into the common idiom is emblematic of the incarnation in which the Word became flesh.”⁸³ It originated in the world where Aramaic, Hebrew and Greek were regularly used by its earliest adherents, so much so that Pilate needed to have the sign he placed on Jesus cross-rendered in multiple languages. Because Christianity is intended to be a worldwide religion there is an underlying assumption that the message of Christianity, to be received by the world, needs to be rendered in the *lingua franca* of the lost world. “No language is forbidden, nor is any one language a prerequisite.”⁸⁴ This is clearly seen in the miraculous event of Acts 2. The apostles had the ability to be heard in the *languages* of the foreigners of the ancient world. But this was a unique experience in the early church, never repeated. How then would the apostles’ words, which were the words of Christ, be expected to be rendered into the languages of the world as they made their way out of Jerusalem? It could only have happened through Bible translation.

Conversely, Islam is a religion of one ancient text, rightly read in Arabic only. True there are modern renderings of the Qur’an in other modern languages, but the true Muslim believes that to study the Qur’an and understand it aright, one must learn Arabic. No other language accurately conveys the actual meaning of the Muslim text. It is ultimately an absurd notion put forth implicitly by KJV proponents, that to know and love God, one must learn and read Elizabethan English or one simply does not possess the Word of God. A failure to grasp this essential element of Christianity is to miss God’s ultimate purpose.

⁸²I am indebted for this idea from a paper that was delivered on the KJV at the Baylor University in April 2011 by Dr. Lamin Sanneh, a Muslim scholar who teaches at Yale. See “The King James Bible and the Vernacular Process,” *The King James Bible and the World It Made*, Baylor University, 7 April 2011.

⁸³Lamin Sanneh, quoted in Ken Camp, “Christianity a ‘Translated Religion’—into Living Word and Written Word,” posted at Associated Baptist Press, 21 April 2011, <http://www.abpnews.com/content/view/6340/53/> (accessed 26 June 2011).

⁸⁴Sanneh, quoted in *ibid.*

God's intention was that his Word be rendered in the language of the common man or woman, be it English, French or Bengali. To that end, faithful Christians have continued to render the text of Scripture into the modern languages of the world. As those languages change over time, so too must their translations. Words and idioms change. So too must the biblical texts be altered, adapted, and re-translated so as to accurately render the timeless message of God into the languages of those to whom it was sent.