

ENQUIRE WITHIN

Question: *I read in my newspaper that 2011 is the 400th anniversary of the King James Bible and that there are plans to promote this Bible translation for schools and home study nationally. Do you think this is a good idea?*

Answer: Well, it certainly has risks involved. Just look at what was said in the General Synod:-

'Following debate, the Revd. John Dunnett moved the following amended motion, which was carried by the Synod:

'That this Synod

(a) believe that the 400th anniversary in 2011 of the King James Version of the Bible is an obvious opportunity to celebrate the exceptional contribution which that translation has made to shaping the life, language and culture of this and other nations;

(b) commend the King James Version and other translations of the Bible as relevant and authoritative for personal and public instruction, reiterating the importance of continuing Biblical translation, scholarship and teaching;

(c) note with enthusiasm the events throughout the year being organised by the 2011 Trust and other bodies, details of which

are to be warmly commended to Church and local communities; and

(d) request that dioceses, deaneries and parishes undertake local initiatives to celebrate and teach the Bible both within the Church and throughout wider society.'

In effect, there will be a quatercentenary celebration of the publication of the Authorised Version of the Bible in 1611. There will be events which churches and others will be invited to join in with or contribute to, and of various kinds, as yet not published.

The King James Bible, (KJ) as the translation of 1611 is sometimes called, has been of pivotal importance in both the theology of Reformed Christianity in England and the development of the English language itself.

The KJ is full of wonderful examples of the language of the 17th century. It is stylish, beautiful, poetic, moving, wonderful, stunning and very old fashioned. I love it and it was the translation on which I was brought up as a child and I never fail to admire it whenever I read it or hear it.

To my mind the KJ compares very well with every other translation I have ever read, none of which give the same intense experience of reading.

And so, why did we drop it? Quite simply, in order to make it more accurate as a translation and then to make it more understandable to those whose contemporary language was quite different to that of the 17th century. Times changed and the KJ, despite its beauty, started to sound almost like a foreign language.

In fact, it was in the 19th century that people started to ask if it was possible to improve on the KJ for the benefit of worship and study. In 1881, a revision of the KJ Old Testament was published, followed in 1885 by the New Testament.

The stated aim of the translators was "to adapt King James' version to the present state of the English language without changing the idiom and vocabulary," and "to adapt it to the present standard of Biblical

scholarship." Further, it was to be "the best version possible in the nineteenth century, as King James' version was the best which could be made in the seventeenth century."

The process, once started, became unstoppable. Every generation since has tried its hand at making the Bible more understandable and accessible for contemporary people. So why focus again on 1611? I fear that there are dangers that this will become a backward-looking year of nostalgia and even more seriously, it could be a year which sees the divisions in the church made even more visible because of theological differences in interpretations of the Bible which may be highlighted as the year goes by. It seems to me inevitable.

But in the mean-time, why not dust off your old KJ and have a read. It really is a refreshing change to what we hear on Sundays. But I wouldn't want to hear it every week!!

