

The King James Bible and Its Readers: Constructing Readable Space in Post-
Reformation England.

by
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A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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Abstract

This study examines the 1611 King James Bible. It explores the religious, political and economic factors that contributed to its production and reception in seventeenth century England. It also considers the Bible's later cultural dominance in the light of some of the larger historical forces that were crucial to its long-term success. The King James Bible, I argue throughout, was more than just a great translation: it was also a material book designed with particular uses in mind and a commercial commodity that needed to appeal to a wide segment of the English population in order to become economically viable. The way the Bible's producers chose to confront these issues ultimately contributed to the success their Bible enjoyed in its first several decades and to its near total dominance of the Bible market over the next four hundred years.

Introduction

The King James Bible and Its Readers: Constructing Readable Space in Post-Reformation England

Since it was first published in 1611, the King James Bible has achieved an enormous popular success. For almost two hundred years, it was the only Bible available in England and America, and it is still in wide-spread popular use almost four hundred years later. Alongside the works of William Shakespeare, it is consistently proclaimed to be one of the two texts that have had the greatest impact on the development of the modern English language. It is also one of only a handful of books that have managed to sell more than a hundred million copies, and it continues to be a bestseller to this day. Few books have ever been read by more people; certainly no other English book has enjoyed a wider circulation over a longer period of time. But, we might ask ourselves today, how was the book that became “the world’s biggest best-seller” received by its first English readers?¹ What was the Bible’s significance when it made its first appearance? How, finally, did it manage to achieve such success?

The following study considers the religious, political and economic motivations that contributed to the production and reception of the King James Bible in early seventeenth century England. It also examines the Bible’s cultural dominance in light of some of the larger historical forces that were crucial in establishing it as England’s preeminent translation of the Bible. In recent years, scholars have become increasingly aware that meaning never

1 David Daniell, *The Bible in English: Its History and Influence* (New Haven and London, 2003), p. 431.

simply corresponds to what a text says, but also includes both the way it is physically presented, and the practices involved in reading it.² In order to recover the King James Bible's initial historical and cultural significance, then, this study asks how a number of issues peculiar to seventeenth century England had an impact on its production and distribution, and how its material layout contributed to its reception by English readers.

Three convictions inform this approach. First, scholarly analysis of the King James Bible has often remained narrowly focussed on problems of translation, leaving important questions about its material history aside. It needs to be said, however, that my turn away from a direct examination of the translation in no way implies a larger judgement of its value; it is simply an attempt to focus on other important questions that have too often tended to be neglected. Second, in order to understand how the King James Bible produced social, political, and religious meaning, it needs to be placed in its original historical context alongside other Bibles, books, and printed materials that had an impact on its production and reception. The King James Bible, as this study suggests, was more than just a great translation: it was also a material book designed with particular uses in mind and a commodity that needed to appeal to a wide spectrum of the English population in order to become commercially viable. Finally, by placing the King James Bible in this broad historical context, we can better understand how it participated in the development of a "post-

2 Foundational instances of this multifaceted approach include D. F. McKenzie's important work in *The Panizzi Lectures, 1985: Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London, 1986), Jerome McGann's *The Textual Condition* (Princeton, 1991), as well as Robert Darnton's famous essay, "What is the History of Books," in *The Kiss of Lamourette: Reflections in Cultural History* (New York, 1990). More recently, scholars like William H. Sherman in his *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 2008) have focussed in particular on the marks left by readers in their texts, leaving a trace of their heterogeneous reading practices on books they read themselves. The relatively recent collection of essays edited by Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer, *Books and Readers in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia, 2002) is also a good place to begin.

Reformation” piety that was meant to appeal to a wide spectrum of the English population, restoring a measure of unity to an English Church that was often thought to be threatened by sectarian conflict. The ways in which the Bible’s producers chose to respond to each of these issues ultimately contributed to the success their Bible enjoyed in its first several decades, and, in turn, to its long-term dominance over the next four centuries.

Methodologically, this project examines what Jerome McGann calls “bibliographic codes,” asking what impact they had on the Bible’s first English readers.³ In McGann’s lexicon, “bibliographic codes” are constituted by, amongst other things, typefaces, title-pages, illustrations, page format, size, cross-references, indexes, concordances, verse numbers, calendars, and marginal commentary. Each represents an important technological development that alters a text’s reception, opening up certain possibilities in a book’s “readable space,” while closing off others. But because readers always approach texts in different ways, the “actualization” of a text—or the meaning produced in the encounter between readers and books—is never actually fixed.⁴ Therefore, the practices of individual readers, or even *groups* of readers, need to be considered in order to gain a better understanding of the meanings a text may have produced in its original historical context—or perhaps even more appropriately, in its various historical *contexts*.

3 See Jerome McGann, “The Socialization of Texts,” reprinted in *The Book History Reader*. 2nd ed., David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery, eds. (London and New York, 2006), p. 66-73.

4 The terms “readable space” and “actualization” come from an essay by Roger Chartier, “Labourer and Voyagers: from the text to the reader,” *Diacritics* 22.2 (1992): 49-61. Chartier himself, however, is discussing the use of the terms by Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Trans. Steven F. Rendall. (Berkeley, 1984), pp. 170-1.

I.

In the four hundred years since it was first printed, a substantial body of commentary grown up around the King James Bible. Most of this work has tended to celebrate the Bible's contribution to the development of English culture from somewhat uncritical perspectives. In recent years, new historicism—a movement that was once duly chastened for overlooking the crucial role played by religion in early modern politics—has refocussed its considerable critical powers on precisely these sorts of tensions.⁵ Since then important works have been written on the historical circumstances surrounding the production of William Tyndale's New Testament (1526),⁶ Henry VIII's Great Bible (1539),⁷ and to a lesser extent, on the Puritan Geneva Bible (1560). But the King James Bible has yet to attract the same kind of renewed scholarly interest, perhaps because the Jacobean period was itself relatively free of the kind of open religious conflict that characterized earlier periods, making it an apparently less worthy subject for sustained scholarly consideration of this kind. There have, of course, been notable exceptions to this somewhat general rule: John Barnard, for instance, recently considered the publication of the King James Bible in light of what we now know about the workings of the King's Printing-house;⁸ David Norton, for his part, meticulously reconstructs the Bible's textual history;⁹ and Alister McGrath, in a book for a popular audience, considers its impact from a broad historical perspective.¹⁰ What is largely absent from these studies, however, is

5 The most notable example of this explicit turn in “new historicist” work is Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger, eds. *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997).

6 On Tyndale's Bible see in particular James Simpson's recent study, *Burning to Read* (Cambridge, MA, 2007).

7 David Scott Kastan, “‘The noyse of the new Bible’: reform and reaction in Henrician England,” in McEachern and Shuger, *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 46-68.

8 John Barnard, “The Financing of the Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert Barker and ‘Combining’ and ‘Sleeping’ Stationers.” *Publishing History* 57 (2005): 5-52.

9 David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Oxford, 2005).

10 Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (London, 2001).

any sustained consideration of the relationship between the Bible's bibliographic form and its larger cultural impact. To help fill this gap, the present study asks a number of basic questions. What kinds of reading did the layout of the King James Bible make possible? What kinds of reading did it exclude? What was the historical significance of the Bible's size and its use of title-pages? What historical and political circumstances can help account for its peculiarities of form?

Much of the scholarship surrounding the King James Bible has been characterized by a persistent tendency to overemphasize the Bible's substantial literary merit, overlooking the material circumstances surrounding its production and reception. This tendency, while understandably attractive to those who have grown to favour this particular translation above all others, often makes it seem as though the Bible's readers were irresistibly drawn to the beauty and grandeur of its style, thus obscuring the important historical interests that were involved in securing its long-term success. A revealing example of this tendency can be found in the work of the nineteenth century biblical scholar, B. F. Westcott, who once claimed that

From the middle of the seventeenth century, the King's Bible has been the acknowledged Bible of the English-speaking nations throughout the world simply because it is the best. A revision which embodied the ripe fruits of nearly a century of labour, and appealed to the religious instinct of a great Christian people, gained by its own internal character a vital authority which could never have been secured by an edict of sovereign rulers.¹¹

The belief that the King James Bible came to dominate the English Bible market simply because it appealed to the "religious instinct of a great Christian people" is now less likely to

¹¹ Ibid, p. 207.

be accepted quite so readily, perhaps because of an awareness of the dangers involved in assuming the existence of a “national instinct,” religious or otherwise. But the belief that the Bible’s success was based on its own “internal character” remains alive and well. As one American novelist wrote towards the end of the twentieth century: “The greatest writer in the English language so far was Lancelot Andrewes...the chief translator and paraphraser among the scholars who gave us the King James Bible.”¹² This sentiment has been echoed many times: it is something of a truism to declare this particular translation to be a “monument of English prose.” Of course, no one would seriously deny that the King James Bible has become a “monument” of one sort or another, but attributing its success to its status as a great literary work gets things wrong in at least two important ways.

First, it fails to take the Bible’s status as the sacred text of the Christian Church sufficiently into account. Put simply, looking back on the King James Bible with anachronistic judgements about its literary value may be a productive endeavour for literary critics, but it almost certainly misrepresents the Bible’s significance for its first readers. For them, the Bible was not only—and not even primarily—a literary text: it was, instead, the living word of God. As T. S. Eliot once observed regarding the literary status of the King James Bible, “Those who talk of the Bible as a “monument of English Prose” are merely admiring it as a monument over the grave of Christianity...the Bible has had a literary influence *not* because it has been considered as literature, but because it has been considered as the report of the word of God.”¹³ When the King James Bible was first printed, the grave of Christianity had yet to be dug, and the Bible was still a vital force. This is obviously a

12 Kurt Vonnegut, *Time quake* (New York, 1997), p. 132.

13 T. S. Eliot, “Religion and Literature.” *Selected Prose*. Ed. Frank Kermode (London, 1975), p. 98.

significant point, particularly since the Bible's sacred status had real consequences for where and how it was read, which also had consequences for how it came to be perceived in subsequent years. Beginning in 1611, for instance, the King James Bible began replacing those Bibles previously authorized for use in English churches—or in other words, the Great Bible from Henry VIII's reign and the Bishops' Bible from Elizabeth I's. As people first heard the new Bible being read during church services, and at weddings, funerals, baptisms and other important life-events, it slowly began to gain currency in their lives. Its words soon became familiar markers for both the joys and sorrows of life, as readers began to grow more accustomed to it. Moreover, because the King James Bible was simultaneously printed in small formats for private use, it was also associated with private use in homes, a fact that certainly contributed to its eventual hold on the imaginations of later generations of English readers. In other words, the places the Bible was read, and the approaches to reading those places often inspired, both had important consequences for its impact on English religious culture.

The second problem with attributing the King James Bible's success to its literary value alone is that it fails to take the politics behind the Bible's publication seriously enough. As this study shows, the new Bible was part of a larger ecclesiastical policy that was aimed at restoring unity to the English Church. For decades, the Church of England had been troubled by infighting between Catholics and Protestants, and amongst Protestants themselves, as traditionalist and more radical factions argued bitterly over issues that were important to the stability of the fledgling Protestant Church. Often these debates were intensely focussed on the proper use and distribution of the English Bible. It is therefore unsurprising that James

hoped to achieve unity by publishing a version of the Bible that could be used by all of the English people.¹⁴ As W. B. Patterson puts it, “the king aimed to find a middle ground between two widely separated groups in the English Church [that is, between Puritans and conformists]...Above all, he sought to find a basis—through a revised Prayer Book, an expanded catechism, and a new translation of the Bible—for a genuine religious unity among his subjects.”¹⁵ In order to accomplish this goal, the translation he commissioned had to be as neutral as possible, free of controversial doctrine, open to readers of different kinds. The same was true for how the Bible was printed. As we will see, the policy of religious accommodation had important consequences for the Bible's layout, including the appearance of its title-page, the absence marginal notes, and even its physical size, each of which helped to make it the popular translation that it would eventually become. Politics, even if they were moderate politics, were heavily involved in securing the Bible's success.

And yet, Westcott's claim (noted on p. 4) that the new Bible achieved its authority without the aid of a sovereign edict is, in a certain sense, true, since no edict was ever issued on its behalf. In fact, contrary to what many people believe, this “Authorized Version” was never actually authorized.¹⁶ But Westcott's claim also risks obscuring the fact that the Bible *did* eventually receive the full support of ecclesiastical authorities, who ensured its long-term success through a series of quiet interventions that were made during the reigns of James and Charles. These interventions, which will be discussed in chapter three, began in earnest in 1616 when the King's Printer was quietly “encouraged to print no more Geneva Bibles.”¹⁷ It

14 For an account of James' relatively inclusive religious policy which was aimed at the unification of the religious community both within and beyond England's borders, see W. B. Patterson, *King James VI and I and the Reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997).

15 Patterson, p. 48.

16 A. W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible* (London, 1911), p. 61.

17 Pollard, p. 73.

was a move that, by all accounts, effectively sealed the fate of the Geneva version and secured the future monopoly of the King James Bible. The full force of this measure would of course take a number of years to be felt as editions of the Geneva Bible continued to be shipped into England from the continent. But the first steps towards its eventual elimination had already been taken. In 1637, when Archbishop Laud finally put a stop to the importation of the Geneva Bible altogether, claiming that its sales threatened the viability of the English Bible trade, the process was finally complete.¹⁸ From this point on, the King James Bible held a near total monopoly on the English Bible trade, and it was well on its way towards permanently establishing itself in the affections of the English people.

An edict was unnecessary not because the translation was so strong but because the King James Bible was the only Bible purchasable for use in England. Because it was available for use in churches *and* for use in homes, officials knew that it was bound to leave its mark on English culture if it was given enough time to do so. But Jacobean officials also knew that a direct edict would have caused too much of a stir, so they chose to proceed by means of “encouragement” rather than by outright command. As Brian Cummings notes, the Jacobean regime tended to be patient and deliberate in its political calculations, understanding that the open imposition of royal authority often led only to further discord and not to greater unity.¹⁹ In this respect, the Jacobean policy, in some ways very much like the Elizabethan policy, was one of careful restraint and guarded silence. It was a policy that avoided clear declarations on controversial matters that could lead to open conflict. By contrast, Henry VIII had tried to control religious dissent with direct royal Injunctions, an approach that often

¹⁸ David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 91.

¹⁹ See Brian Cummings, *The Literary Culture of the Reformation: Grammar and Grace* (Oxford, 2002). In particular, the sections on George Herbert, Lancelot Andrewes, and John Donne.

angered his opponents and led to further discord.²⁰ His attempt to suppress the Bible by preventing its circulation largely failed to quell opposition to the Church, contributing instead to the perception that the Church opposed Scripture, adding fuel to the dissenting fire. Rather than seeking to eradicate opposition in such an open way, Jacobean officials pursued unity by avoiding polarizing positions in their efforts to keep conflict to a minimum. A restrained approach on their part made it much more difficult for religious factions to define themselves in opposition to the Church.

This suggests, if nothing else, that the politics behind the publication of the King James Bible were absolutely vital to its success, especially since it was not particularly well-received when it made its first appearance. In fact, for at least the first several decades after its initial publication, it came under persistent attacks from a number of critics who claimed to be dissatisfied with what they felt to be the poor quality of the translation. David Daniell notes that in 1659 “a London clergyman and scholar, Dr Robert Gell, published an 800-page treatise denouncing [the King James Bible], discussing its faults in detail, counting among them the denial of Christ’s authority.”²¹ The length of the treatise, and the nearly fifty years that had passed since the King James Bible was first published, suggest that the opposition to it was deeply felt and firmly entrenched. Alister McGrath notes a similar instance: in 1612, Hugh Broughton, “a notoriously grumpy old man who disliked working with others....professed himself ‘crossed’ by the new translation, and declared that the only useful thing that could be done with it was to burn it.”²² Whether or not Broughton actually meant what he said is difficult to discern: he was prone to rhetorical flair and he died only a year

20 Thomas Betteridge, “The Henrician Reformation and mid-Tudor culture.” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 35 (2005): 91-110.

21 David Daniell, p. 429.

22 McGrath, p. 279.

later. But the existence of such criticisms reveals that the Bible met with vocal opposition from what was, at the very least, a passionate minority—a point which certainly suggests that it might be somewhat short-sighted to claim that the Bible came to dominate the field “simply because it was the best.” Literary value is largely a matter of taste, and there were many who felt that the new Bible was by no means “the best” translation. Its eventual popularity can be explained in other ways: given enough time, and the support of ecclesiastical officials, the translation grew on people, achieving popularity as it became more familiar, endearing itself to readers as its rhythms were eventually internalized.

II.

To understand the significance of the King James Bible for its first readers, we also need to remember the vital role played by religion in the period. It is well known, for instance, that post-Reformation English culture was profoundly word-centred, and that the central word in this word-centred culture was the Bible. But what does this actually mean? For one thing, it means that the Bible was the word of God, the sacred text of the English Church. Therefore, it had an important role to play in shaping the religious and political life of the nation, making it a powerful force both in the maintenance of order and in the resistance to it. Discussing the Bible’s ubiquitous presence in seventeenth century culture, Christopher Hill once wrote that

For most men and women the Bible was their point of reference in all their thinking....The Bible was the source of virtually all ideas; it supplied the idiom in which men and women discussed them....To say that the English Revolution was

about religion is a tautology; it took place in the seventeenth-century.²³

As Hill suggests, no book had more of an impact on the every-day lives of the English people: it would be difficult, in fact, to overestimate its cultural importance at the time. The Bible was the authority on almost every issue of any importance: private and public, religious and political, moral and juridical—even science and the arts were based in the authority of Scripture at the time.

Confirming the Bible's central status in the culture of the period, the preface to the King James Bible encourages its readers to “Take vp and read, take vp and read the Scriptures” since they “bee so full and so perfect,” asking them to reflect carefully on their reading practices: “how can wee excuse our selues of negligence, if we doe not studie them, of curiositie, if we be not content with them?”²⁴ The spiritual benefits of reading the Bible, it suggests, are absolutely unparalleled, and it should therefore be approached with proper reverence:

It is not onely an armour, but also a whole armorie of weapons, both offensiue, and defensiu; whereby we may saue our selues and put the enemie to flight. It is not an herbe, but a tree, or rather a whole paradise of trees of life, which bring foorth fruit euery moneth, and the fruit thereof is for meate, and the leaues for medicine. It is not a pot of *Manna*, or a cruse of oyle, which were for memorie only, or for a meales meate or two, but as it were a showre of heauenly bread sufficient for a whole host, be it neuer so great...²⁵

The list of the Bible's virtues is overwhelming: it goes on like this for more than half a folio

²³ Christopher Hill, *The English Bible and the Seventeenth-Century Revolution* (London, 1993), Quoted in Daniell, p. 461.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 778.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 779.

page. No book, the preface suggests, could ever be more important when it comes to spiritual matters. It possesses healing powers and protective qualities, like a medicine or a charm, a “Physions shop...of preservatives against poisoned heresies.”²⁶ “And what maruaile?” the translators write,

The originall thereof being from heauen, not from earth; the author being God, not man; the enditer, the holy spirit, not the wit of the Apostles or Prophets; the Pen-men such as were sanctified from the wombe, and endowed with a principall portion of Gods spirit; the matter, veritie, pietie, purite, vprightnesse; the forme, Gods word, Gods testimonie, Gods oracles, the word of trueth, the word of saluation.²⁷

To neglect the Scriptures was essentially to neglect the fundamental source of the Christian's spiritual life.

In a culture where the Bible played such a vital role in people's lives, the “architecture” of the book—that is, the material form of the text, or the layout of the page that made it possible to “inhabit” the Bible in particular ways—mattered more than that it did for most other books. Often, a Bible's architecture had important political consequences: for example, when James I declared that his new Bible should contain “No Marginal Notes,” he tacitly acknowledged the impact of textual form on textual meaning, recognizing that if he wanted to avoid controversy, he was going to have to keep controversy out of the Bible's margins.²⁸ But the consequences of a Bible's architecture were just as likely to be devotional in nature: for instance, when the 1557 Geneva New Testament became the first English Bible to use verse

²⁶ Ibid., p. 779.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 779.

²⁸ For a discussion of the marginal notes in the Geneva Bible and of their removal in the King James Bible, see William W. E. Slights, *Managing Readers: Printed Marginalia in English Renaissance Books* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), particularly pp. 101-27.

numbers, the goal was to make it easier for common readers to find particular passages and to remember the texts they read. In other words, it was an attempt to facilitate Bible study and rote memorization, which were both ways of “inhabiting” the text.²⁹ But there were also economic considerations that made it necessary to “construct” books in particular ways. For instance, in order to meet the commercial demand and to make a profit, printers in early modern England published an enormous number of small Bibles meant for private reading. And yet, ecclesiastical politics often overrode the economic concerns of the *King's* Printer, who was required to print large Bibles meant for use in churches to satisfy ecclesiastical demand. Printing these Bibles, as we will see, was always a costly venture that had destroyed more than one otherwise successful printing business.³⁰ Keeping this in mind, the following study sets out to examine the production and reception of the King James Bible, approaching it from the three related perspectives of religion, politics, and economics. But because the motivations behind the Bible's production and reception were often conflicting and intertwined, there will be much overlap between these somewhat arbitrary categories. As this suggests, my purpose throughout is not so much to isolate these issues, but to show how they were always intimately related.

Chapter one thus begins by examining the title-page of the King James Bible, approaching it from a largely devotional perspective. It argues that the architectural structure of the title-page was meant to invite readers into the biblical text by invoking both the entrance to a church (or the church-*porch*) and the gateway to the new Jerusalem as described in the book of Revelation. By drawing on the familiar experience of entering the church

29 For a discussion of the long history of the development of the verse number, from marginal letters to textual numbers, see Paul Saenger, “The Impact of the Early Printed Page on the Reading of the Bible.” in *The Bible as Book: the first printed editions* Eds. Paul Saenger and K. van Kampen (London, 1999), pp. 31-51.

30 For a discussion of the difficulties facing the King's Printer, see Barnard.

building, the title-page encouraged its readers to approach the Bible humbly, preparing them for devotional reading by making an implicit connection between reading the Bible and going to church. By recalling the gates to the new Jerusalem, on the other hand, the title-page reminded readers that reading the Bible was like entering the heavenly city and that they were joining the fellowship of the saints by opening its pages. But while the title-page emphasizes the devotional benefits of reading the Bible, it also attempts to accommodate a broad spectrum of the English population by using images that are notable for their wide devotional appeal. In this sense, the devotional function of the title-page was also working for political and ecclesiastical unity.

Chapter two then turns directly towards a consideration of the political and ecclesiastical motivations that drove the Bible's production, focussing in particular on the role played by Bible size in the contested realm of English Bible reading in the period between 1525 and 1611. As this chapter shows, religious authorities in the period understood that they could control the circulation of Bibles by controlling the format in which they were printed. By limiting the publication of authorized Bibles to large formats, they effectively kept the Bible out of lay hands. But reformers also understood the importance of Bible size, and the Bibles they smuggled into England were usually printed in small formats meant for private use. Therefore, by the time James I took the throne, a tension had emerged between the authorized Bibles printed in large formats and the illicit Bibles printed in small ones, and a similar tension had been allowed to develop between private and public reading. The publication of the King James Bible in both large *and* small formats went a long way towards addressing this tension, establishing a measure of unity in the English Church when it came to

Bible reading. It was, therefore, an ecclesiastical and political intervention with important historical consequences for the Church of England.

Chapter three approaches the publication of the King James Bible from an economic perspective, focussing again on the issue of Bible size. As I will show, printing the King James Bible in small formats was not just a political and ecclesiastical matter, but also one of sheer economic necessity. Because the cost of printing a large “Church Bible” was often astoundingly high, Robert Barker, the King's Printer, needed to find a way to offset the cost by printing the much more economically viable small ones. This economic necessity was in some ways the result of a series of unusual circumstances surrounding the King's Printing House at the time, and it may have been that if Barker had not faced these issues, he would simply have gone on printing the lucrative Geneva Bibles instead. Nonetheless, by 1616 English officials had realized their opportunity to eliminate the Geneva Bible and they asked Barker to cease printing them after this point. It was in everyone's best interest that the Bible become commercially successful, since it would allow the new version to become a sustainable commodity and to grow in popularity over time. Therefore, the economic motivation behind the publication of the King James Bible became implicitly political, which suggests that, in the end, the perspectives cannot really be separated.

Overall, then, this is a study of the “architectural” layout of the King James Bible and its relation to early modern religion, politics and economics. More than any other book in Renaissance England, the Bible was meant to be inhabited by readers whose lives were shaped by an intimate relationship to what they understood to be the living word of God—it was a text with a peculiar status, moulding the political and religious life of the nation. A

study that acknowledges the place of the bibliographic conventions that structured the “architectural” layout of the 1611 King James Bible might therefore help us understand the complex relationship between the Bible and its readers in post-Reformation England. This study aims to contribute to just such a project.

Chapter One

“Enter His Gates”: The King James Bible and the “Comely Frontispiece”

John Guillim's *An Epigram explaining the Frontispiece of this Worke* suggests that readers in Renaissance England often thought of books as buildings. This brief text, appended to his 1610 *A Displaye of Heraldrie*, provides a detailed explanation of the complex allegorical title-page that opens the book. It is worth noting here not only because it explicitly describes the book in architectural terms, but because it focusses on the primary concern of this chapter: that is, the role of the title-page—or the “frontispiece”—in structuring a book's readable space. Part of it reads:

The noble Pindare doth compare somewhere,
Writing with Building, and instructs vs there,
That every great and goodly Edifice,
Doth aske to have a comely Frontispiece.³¹

Two things in particular should be noted about Guillim's epigram: first, that it compares writing to building; and second, that the title-page is consciously conceived as an entrance to the book, a kind of threshold through which readers needed to pass upon opening it. This conceit hinges upon the ambivalent meaning of “frontispiece” as it was defined in the seventeenth century: it was both “the principal face or front of a building” and “the first page of a book or pamphlet, or what is printed on it; the title-page, including illustrations and table

³¹ Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbown, *The Comely Frontispiece: the emblematic title-page in England, 1550-1660* (London, 1979), p. 9.

of contents; hence, an introduction or preface.”³² By exploiting this etymological ambivalence, Guillim provides us with a valuable insight into how books were (or at least could be) conceived in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.

Building on Guillim's conceit, this chapter considers the title-page that opens the King James Bible. It begins by examining the figures that appear on the title-page, arguing that they were chosen for their wide devotional appeal. For instance, some of the images appealed directly to Puritans, while others appealed to Catholics, but all of the images would have been more or less acceptable to the moderate conformists who represented the vast majority of the English population at the time. Often the images seem to have been chosen for what was their ambiguous status, remaining open, as they do, to multiple divergent readings. By maintaining this ambiguous stance, the title-page helped to forge a moderate devotional space that could be inhabited by Christians of all sorts; it was a way of blurring the black and white distinctions between Catholic and Protestant, exploiting ambiguities in order to avoid direct conflict. After examining the figures on the title-page in detail, this chapter then turns to a consideration of the title-page's layout, arguing that it drew on a familiar artistic mode known as the “architectural frontispiece.” This, I argue, was important for at least two reasons. First, it recalled the entrance to a church, a recollection which encouraged readers to inhabit the book reverently. At the same time, it paralleled the entrance to the new Jerusalem as it is described in the book of Revelation. Therefore, it reminded readers that they were entering the heavenly city simply by opening and reading the Bible. Even more importantly, however, by turning the focus away from the political and religious disputes of

32 “Frontispiece.” Def. 1 and 3. *The Oxford English Dictionary*. 2nd ed. 1989. The first definition is close to the current definition (4), which is “An illustration facing the title-page of a book or division of a book.” Definition 3 is now considered obsolete.

the time, the title-page drew attention to the Bible's status as a devotional text that could be inhabited by a diverse body of believers. Everyone, in a sense, was invited. Whether they would take up that invitation was a matter for them to decide.

I.

Like Guillim, the translators of the King James Bible often conceived texts in architectural terms. This was particularly true when it came to the Bible. For instance, writing about the work of previous translators, they claimed to be building upon what had come before: "if we, building upon their foundation that went before us, and being holpen by their labours, do endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike us."³³ The Bible in this passage is like a building. This building is constantly under renovation. The translators contribute to the structure, striving to do whatever they can to leave it in a better condition than when they found it. They see themselves as stewards of a textual tradition, and they vigorously defend that tradition:

we are so far from condemning any of their labours that travelled before us in this kind, either in this land or beyond the sea, either in King Henry's time, or King Edward's (if there were any translation, or correction of translation in his time) or in Queen Elizabeth's of ever renowned memory, that we acknowledge them to have been raised up by God, for the building and furnishing of his Church, and that they deserve to be had of us and of posterity in everlasting remembrance.³⁴

Like any tradition, the translation of the Bible is never complete: it is always being built upon

³³ *The Reader's Bible, being the complete Authorized Version* (London, 1951), p. xxi.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxi.

by those who are “raised up by God, for the building and furnishing of his Church.” Against those critics who would accuse them of doing damage to the Church, of tearing down what had already been built up, or of pursuing innovation for innovation's sake, the translators emphasize their humble but serious approach: “Do we condemn the ancient? In no case: but after the endeavours that went before us, we take the best pains we can in the house of God.”³⁵ The Bible (here conceived as the house of God) is a sacred space that the translators treat with humility and respect, acknowledging the work of those who have gone before. They also understandably hope that their own efforts will be treated kindly; that they too will be “of posterity in everlasting remembrance.” They are therefore careful to rebuke their readers, reminding them to approach the house of God with reverence: “Others have laboured, and *you may enter into their labours*; O receive not so great things in vain: O despise not so great salvation. Be not like swine to tread under foot so precious things, neither yet like dogs to tear and abuse holy things.”³⁶

Translation, as a process that opens the biblical text, is also frequently conceived in architectural terms: “Translation it is that openeth the window, to let in the light...that putteth aside the curtain, that we may look into the most holy place.”³⁷ The Bible is “the most holy place”; it is translation that “putteth aside the curtain” so that the reader may look in. What they find there is “God's word, God's testimony, God's oracles, the word of truth, the word of salvation, etc.”³⁸ The effects of reading this book include “light of understanding, stableness of persuasion, repentance from dead works, newness of life, holiness, peace, joy in the Holy

³⁵ Ibid., p. xxi.

³⁶ Ibid., p. xxx. Emphasis added.

³⁷ Ibid., p. xvi.

³⁸ Ibid., p. xv.

Ghost.”³⁹ The form of the book is such that it will *re-form* the reader, the “end and reward” of which is “fellowship with the saints, participation of the heavenly nature, fruition of an inheritance immortal, undefiled, and that never shall fade away.”⁴⁰ In the end the list of the Bible's good effects leads the translators to conclude on a high-note: “Happy is the man that delighteth in the Scripture, and thrice happy that meditateth in it day and night.”⁴¹ The Bible is not just a book to be haphazardly perused—it is a book to be lived in, to be meditated upon both day and night.

When the translators describe the Bible, they seek to present it as a neutral devotional space that could be inhabited by readers of different devotional persuasions. Part of this clearly had to do with the growing awareness that the only way to achieve religious unity in England was by making room for moderates of all sorts. The English Church had been struggling to maintain a sense of unity for some time, and at least since the Elizabethan Settlement, officials had been trying to accommodate all types. As the translators saw it, their project was therefore “to promote the common good” by making one good translation “not justly to be excepted against” by any of the confessional groups.⁴² The persistence of the conflicts meant that this was always going to be a difficult task. The translators acknowledge their compromised position, suggesting that they might even be in over their heads: “So hard a thing it is to please all, even when we please God best, and do seek to approve ourselves to every one's conscience.”⁴³ Defending their project they point out that, unlike their critics, they are not tied to any ideological position. Instead, they claim to have avoided the extremes

39 Ibid., p. xv.

40 Ibid., p. xv.

41 Ibid., p. xv.

42 Ibid., p. xxvi.

43 Ibid., p. xii.

on either side of the debate:

we have on the one side avoided the scrupulosity of the Puritans, who leave the old Ecclesiastical words, and betake them to other, as when they put *washing* for *baptism*, and *congregation* instead of *church*: as also on the other side we have shunned the obscurity of the Papists, in their *azimes*, *tunike*, *rational*, *holocausts*, *praepuce*, *pasche*, and a number of such like, whereof their late translation is full, and that of purpose to darken the sense.⁴⁴

Rather than translating words along rigid confessional lines, they claim to have allowed for a “diversity of signification” in their approach to the process: “for is the kingdom of God become words and syllables? Why should we be in bondage to them if we may be free, use one [word] precisely when we may use another no less, as commodiously?”⁴⁵ By criticizing the excesses of both the Catholic and the Puritan parties, they present themselves as above such petty disputes. They suggest instead that they are drawn to a higher calling and that they hope their readers will be too. There is a great deal of calculated posturing in all of this, but the end goal was to convince the people that the Church of England and its Bible were really inhabitable by all.

II.

When the translators wrote of the Bible as a building, they were thinking primarily in terms of the biblical *text*—that is, they were thinking of the Bible as a text to be read with particular *habits*—a word which itself implies a kind of “habitation.” But if they thought of

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. xxx.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. xxix.

the Bible as a textual space that was constructed by its author, God, there was also a sense in which the book itself was a space that was meant to be inhabited. To see how this is so, we might turn to the title-page that opens the first edition.

After its cover, the first entry-point into a book is its title-page; and if every edifice wants a “comely frontispiece,” it only makes sense for the title-page to be appealing. The title-page that opens the King James Bible is certainly that.⁴⁶ Designed by Cornelius Boel—an artist from Antwerp who had been commissioned to produce portraits of members of the royal family⁴⁷—it consists of an exquisitely detailed decorative engraving that depicts a number of figures from the Bible poised on an architectural edifice. This section considers the figures on the title-page, particularly in relation to their role in creating a moderate devotional space. Before proceeding too far, however, it is worth noting some of the basic uses of title-pages in the period, even if only because they serve as a background against which to understand the appearance of the King James Bible title-page.

To begin, it should be noted that the appearance of most early title-pages can be partly accounted for by their role as advertisements. When they first appeared in the mid to late fifteenth century, title-pages were a direct response to the new demands presented by the mass-production and commercial resale of books. The story goes something like this.⁴⁸ As printers began producing books in large numbers, they started accumulating a stock-pile that needed to be protected while awaiting sale. Rather than binding the books at this early stage,

46 The description of the title-page that follows is heavily indebted to the one provided by Corbett and Lightbown, pp. 107-11.

47. A. W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible, the documents relating to the translation and publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (Oxford, 1911), p. 62.

48 This “story” is indebted to the helpful insights provided by Margaret M. Smith’s recent study, *The title-page, its early development, 1460-1510* (London, 2000); it also draws on the account in Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin’s, *The Coming of the Book* (London, 1976).

they hit upon a better solution: they would include an extra sheet on the outside of the unbound and gathered quires (before they were sold, books were often stored without covers, primarily to save space). The first title-pages were therefore little more than blank sheets that served as covers for unbound books; in fact, being blank, they were not really title-pages at all. Printers soon realized, however, that it was easier to identify their stock-pile if these outer sheets bore a title. Thus the title-page was born. The commercial potential of the new convention was soon recognized and these pages began to include advertisements about the book's contents along with decorative designs. More often than not, these designs were meant to draw attention to the books, increasing sales. Because economics always played an important role in the appearance of early modern books, the advertising function of the King James Bible's title-page cannot be discounted.

But there were other factors that contributed to a title-page's design, factors that ranged from an engagement in political and religious controversy to an attempt to encourage personal devotion and corporate worship. For an instance of the former we might turn to Henry VIII's Great Bible, first printed in 1539. This Bible includes a title-page that depicts the king seated on his throne, only slightly lower than God (whom we might note is depicted here as an old patriarch—the last time such an image appeared in an English Bible).⁴⁹ Henry is magnanimously handing out Bibles to the leaders of his realm. At the bottom of the page, a thronging mass of peasants have gathered round to celebrate Henry's greatness. They shout “VIVAT REX” and “GOD SAVE THE KING.” Given Henry's reputation as a tyrant, we might conclude that the people have little choice in the matter—to cross the king might mean a trip to prison, or worse. It is hardly surprising, therefore, to find Newgate prison depicted

49 Corbett and Lightbown, p. 40.

on the bottom right hand corner of the page, surely an added incentive for singing Henry's praises. In any case, the overall appearance of the title-page suggests that it was not just an advertisement for resale: it was an example of political and religious propaganda at its strongest.

In a more muted way (though only slightly so) the title-page that opens the 1560 Geneva Bible is also a piece of religious and political propaganda. But now the tables have turned. Rather than celebrating the virtues of the English monarch, this title-page seeks to undermine the authority of Mary's recent Catholic regime, which had ended with her death in 1558. It depicts the Israelite people fleeing captivity in Egypt; like the Israelites, the Genevan exiles were escaping what they believed to be a corrupt and oppressive regime. The similarities between the two groups went further, though: both, for instance, sought refuge by crossing a sea. As a consolation, the title-page suggests that if the exiles might have to wander in the wilderness, they can at least rest easy in the knowledge that God is on their side: "Feare ye not, stand stil, and beholde the salvation of the Lord, which he wil shewe you this day"; "Great are the troubles of the righteous: but the Lord delivers them out of all, Psal. 34,19"; and "The Lord shal fight for you: therefore holde you your peace, Exod. 14,vers.14." As God had defeated the enemies of Israel, he would also defeat the enemies of the godly. England would become a land of milk and honey, a new promised land where the godly would no longer be oppressed. But the most important point is that the establishment Church is compared to Egypt and the pharaoh—a stubborn and irreligious tyrannical power that God would bring to its knees. Given its incendiary implications, there can be little doubt that the title-page was meant to stir up religious and political controversy. Even if the perspective has

shifted from that of the powerful tyrant to that of the self-styled oppressed, it is difficult not to see it as a calculated piece of religious and political propaganda. In the end, it is not so different from the Great Bible it seems to oppose.

But the King James Bible's title-page does neither of these things. At least, it does not do them in any such obvious ways. In fact, as I have already suggested, its primary purpose seems to have been to avoid controversy as much as possible, whether that controversy was defined in religious or political terms. The images on the title-page are all religious, but they are also carefully selected for their relative neutrality or for their appeal to one or both of the parties. Unlike in the Great Bible or the Bishops' Bible, there is no image of the monarch. Unlike in the Geneva Bible, there is no hint of subversion here. Instead, the title-page seeks to encourage personal and corporate devotion, inviting readers to contemplate the Bible's sacred status as the word of God. Rather than creating an exclusive devotional space that would appeal only to one of the religious factions, the compilers of the King James Bible sought to make their Bible inviting to all. One of the clearest ways they did this was through the use of the biblical figures.

The figures on Boel's title-page are taken from both the Old Testament and the New Testament, although the majority of them are from the latter. A quick glance at the page reveals a significant pattern to the placement of these figures: generally speaking, those from the Old Testament are on the bottom, while those from the New Testament are on the top. This layout suggests, amongst other things, that the promises of the New Testament are built upon the foundation of the Old, as the New Testament figures rest upon the base laid down by the Old Testament patriarchs. Although this is a clear depiction of relationship between the

old and new dispensations, or of the relationship between the law and the gospel, it should not be read as a simple form of supersessionism, since the Old Testament figures serve as the foundation for the scene. In fact, the careful balance between old and new is one of the fundamental characteristics of Boel's overall design. For one thing, many of the images he uses were meant to appeal not just to conservatives who looked back to the stability of Elizabeth's reign with fondness, but also to those who looked forward to moderate reforms in the new reign of James I. By integrating the old and the new, the Bible presents the image of a Church with stable traditions, but which could simultaneously embrace reform.

If the interplay between the old and the new is one of the main themes of Boel's title-page, it is the Old Testament figures who serve as the foundation. On the centre-left of the page, housed in an arched niche, Moses stands holding his staff and the Ten Commandments—a very common feature on post-Reformation title-pages. On the centre-right stands Aaron, the High Priest, holding a knife and a cup. Unlike Moses, Aaron rarely appears on title-pages from the period. Given his association with the priesthood, it is hardly surprising that the principle examples come from a handful of Catholic Bibles that were printed abroad.⁵⁰ We might therefore ask what he is doing in a Bible that was meant to be used in the Protestant Church of England? In the title-page's typically ambiguous fashion, there are a couple of possible answers.

On the one hand, Aaron's appearance might be taken as a guarded defence of the Church of England's Episcopal hierarchy, a hierarchy that was believed to be under attack from the more radical wings of the Presbyterian movement. There are definite historical precedents that support this reading. At the Hampton Court conference, for instance, James

⁵⁰ Corbett and Lightbown, p. 108.

emphatically defended the Church's ecclesiastical structure, making the devastating statement (for Presbyterians, anyway)—“No Bishop, No King.” By placing Aaron on the title-page, the Bible's producers may have been making a veiled statement against the Presbyterian movement, defending the king and his bishops. Although historians point out that the influence of the Presbyterian movement had been significantly reduced by the persistent efforts of the Elizabethan regime by the early 1590's, it should also be remembered that James had been living in Scotland where Presbyterianism was still a vital force. He may therefore have been more sensitive to the perceived Presbyterian threat. As Patrick Collinson suggests: “in Scotland the presbyterians were his ideological opponents, not afraid to tell the king to his face that the Church was not his kingdom but Christ's, in which he was a simple member and subject to discipline like any other christian.”⁵¹ In a sense it hardly matters whether or not there actually was a robust Presbyterian movement in England at the time; we only need to think of the characterization of Islam in our own time to realize that popular belief (and government policy) is not always tied to empirical reality.

In any case, Aaron may have been a strategically placed clerical figure that was meant to defend the Episcopacy against the perceived Presbyterian threat. But as Corbett and Lightbown suggest, it is also possible that the use of the image was actually a conciliatory gesture meant to appease Catholic conservatives, emphasizing continuity with the Catholic religious past. This continuity was signalled by the previous use of Aaron on the title-pages of the Catholic Louvain Bibles, printed in France. As Corbett and Lightbown write:

Probably only Roman Catholics and those with Roman leanings would have been

⁵¹ Patrick Collinson, “The Jacobean Religious Settlement: The Hampton Court Conference,” in *Before the English Civil War: Essays on Early Stuart Politics and Government* Ed. Howard Tomlinson (London, 1983), p. 30.

acquainted with the title-pages to the Louvain Bibles; to those who were, it must have afforded a secret pleasure to discover the figure of Aaron possibly taken from it for the title-page to the new English version. But though the compilers neither wished to “be traduced by those Popish Persons” nor “maligned by self-conceited Brethren”, they sincerely hoped for conciliation of all branches of opinion, Puritan as well as Roman Catholic.⁵²

The point is of course speculative, but it seems to fit well with the overall thrust of the policies that drove the Bible's producers. If they wanted to find a way to bring conservatives on board, this would have been a relatively safe way of doing it, since Catholics were likely the only ones who would recognize the significance of the gesture. On the other hand, the very obscurity of the gesture would likely negate much of its effectiveness, since almost no one would get the point. Either way, though, these two figures—Moses (the Law) and Aaron (the intermediary Priesthood)—are built into the foundation of the title-page's biblical structure, a vital part of its architectural layout.

There are, however, three exceptions to this general pattern. Seated below Moses on the step of the edifice is St Luke, dipping his pen into an inkwell. The book he is holding is open and the calf at his side seems to be prodding him to write. Below Aaron sits St John, holding his book open on his lap. Although he is also holding a pen, he is distracted by something above—possibly by the image of the Lamb at the top of the page: therefore, the eagle holding his inkwell may have to wait a while. The most important of the three figures is not St Luke or St John, however: instead, it is the familiar medieval emblem known as the Pelican in her piety. A symbol of Christ's sacrifice—and by extension, of the Eucharist—it

⁵² Ibid., p. 111.

depicts the Pelican who pricks her breast to feed her starving young. This emblem had a long history that could be traced back well into the Middle Ages.⁵³ Its appearance on a biblical title-page from this period is unusual, however—this is, in fact, the first time it was ever used for this purpose in England. Its association with the Eucharist and with the feast of Corpus Christi have led some scholars to view it as a sign of growing “High-Anglican” feeling towards the Eucharist.⁵⁴ This may be true, but it should also be noted that the concepts of Anglicanism and High-Anglicanism are clearly anachronistic, as “Anglicanism” was a term that developed only much later in the seventeenth century and “High-Anglicanism” emerged in Oxford in the nineteenth century. There is, however, another way of accounting for its presence. As Alister McGrath points out:

There is a curious irony to this symbol...Oxford and Cambridge colleges were often named after the religious festival nearest to the day of their founding. One Oxford and one Cambridge college derived their name from this medieval religious feast [Corpus Christi]. And who was the president of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, at the time of the commissioning of the new Bible? None other than the same John Reynolds, who had been the original inspiration for the new translation.⁵⁵

According to accounts of the Hampton Court conference, it was Reynolds, a moderate Puritan who had been invited to represent the Puritan cause, who first proposed the “*newe translation of the Bible*.”⁵⁶ The brief mention of the Puritan involvement in the conference as it is

⁵³ Ibid., p. 110. The writers note that the image of the Pelican “can be traced back to the end of the second century.”

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 41.

⁵⁵ Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York, 2001), p. 210.

⁵⁶ ‘The Summe and Substance of the Conference, which it pleased his Excellent Maiestie to haue with the Lords, Bishops and other of his Clergie, (at which the most of the Lordes of the Councell were present) in His Maiesties Priuy-Chamber, at Hampton Court, January 14, 1603. Contracted by William Barlow, Doctor of

described in the King James Bible is not particularly favourable. It presents the image of a difficult sect whose “scrupulosity” (a uniformly negative term) leaves room for few accommodations:

For the very historical truth is, that upon the importunate petitions of the Puritans, at his Majesty's coming to the crown, the Conference of the Hampton Court having been appointed for hearing their complaints: when by force of reason they were put from all other grounds, they had recourse at the last, to this shift, that they could not with good conscience subscribe to the Communion book, since it maintained the Bible as it was there translated, which was, as they said, a most corrupt translation. And although this was judged to be but a very poor and empty shift; yet even hereupon did his Majesty begin to think himself of the good that might ensue by a new translation, and presently after gave order for this translation which is now presented unto thee. Thus much to satisfy our scrupulous brethren.⁵⁷

The passage seems to dismiss the Puritan concerns outright as poor and empty shift; the quip “thus much to satisfy our scrupulous brethren” is particularly harsh. Nonetheless, the impetus for the conference was the Millenary Petition, a document delivered by Puritan activists to James as he rode from Edinburgh to London for his coronation. It can hardly be said that their cause was completely overlooked. At the very least, James took the petition as an opportunity to appear attentive to Puritan concerns, something that is supported by his claim that he commended the “learned and grave men on both sides.”⁵⁸ The inclusion of the

Divinity, and Deane of Chester. Whereunto are added, some copies, (scattered abroad), vnsauory, and vntrue. London, Printed by Iohn Windett, for Matthew Law and are to be sold at his shop in Paules Churchyard, neare S. Austens Gate. 1604. Quoted in A. W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible*

57 *The Reader's Bible*, p. xxii-iii.

58 Quoted in Collinson, p. 31.

emblem may therefore have been a subtle recognition of Reynold's contribution to the process, a quiet nod to the Puritan faction. If so, it suggests that the negative representation of the Puritan cause in the note "To the Reader" was in turn meant to present the king as a generous and accommodating monarch, even (perhaps especially) when it came to the "importunate petitions" of his most difficult subjects. Either way, it seems likely that authorities would have been aware, at the very least, of the emblem's ambiguity, and the simple fact that the image could be viewed as evidence both of official support for traditionalism *and* for moderate Puritanism would certainly have recommended its use to the Bible's producers.

There is one more feature on this part of the title-page that is worth noting for its political and ecclesiastical moderation: along the top of the edifice are a dozen blazons, each representing one the twelve tribes of Israel. These blazons are lifted directly from the title-page that opens the 1602 edition of the Bishops' Bible. The continuity between the two title-pages was part of a deliberate attempt to emphasize the relationship between the (old) Bishops' Bible and the (new) King James Bible: to avoid stepping on any toes, the King James Bible was advertised not as a new translation, but as a revision of the Bishops' Version. In the note "To the Reader" the translators carefully point out that their goal was not to make a "bad" translation good, "but to make a good one better."⁵⁹ The point was to bring as many people under the tent of the English Church as possible and it was important to avoid giving unnecessary offence. Therefore, the new Bible had to do two things. On the one hand, it had to make the point that the king and his bishops were willing to take the Puritan cause seriously, providing them with a new translation they could accept for use in churches. On

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. xxiv.

the other hand, it had to emphasize its continuity with the Elizabethan Settlement, to which the moderate majority of conformist Christians had grown strongly attached.⁶⁰ One way this continuity could be established was through the Bible's title-page. The fact that the King James Bible used the title-page from the 1602 Bishops' Bible as the model for its own main title-page is important. The fact that it actually reuses the 1602 title-page itself to introduce the New Testament confirms the point.

The remaining portion of the base is taken up by the Bible's title, which is the central focus of the whole scene. Like the rest of the title-page, it avoids any direct invocation of religious or political authority. The full title reads:

THE/HOLY/BIBLE,/Conteyning the Old Testament,/AND THE NEW:/Newly
Translated out of the Originall/tongues: & with former Translations/diligently
compared and reuised by his/Maiesties speciall Commandment./Appointed to be read
in Churches./Imprinted at London by Robert/Barker. Printer to the Kings/most
Excellent Maiestie./ANNO DOM. 1611.”⁶¹

There are a number of things about this title worth noting. First, there is the obvious point that it nowhere identifies the Bible as the “King James” Version. That name was only attributed to it much later in the nineteenth century, and even then it was only used in North America. Second, the title nowhere claims that the Bible had been authorized by the king, by his bishops, or even by Parliament. Instead, it uses the word “appointed.” In itself this is a significant point. As A. W. Pollard pointed out nearly a century ago, all editions of the Bishops' Bible printed between 1585 and 1602 (the last edition) include the inscription

⁶⁰ Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge, 1998).

⁶¹ Daniell, image 27.

“Authorized and Appointed to be read in Churches.” The fact that the title omits the word “Authorized” therefore suggests a softening of the authoritative stance of the English Church. Pollard writes: “the word 'Appointed' is considerably weaker than the 'Authorised and Appointed' which it replaced. By itself 'Appointed' means little more than 'assigned' or 'provided.'” The translators themselves clearly hoped that their work would be officially authorized by the king and they tried to force the point by attributing James as the “Author” of the work, albeit in an indirect way: “we hold it our duty to offer it to your Majesty, not only as to our King and Sovereign, but as to the principal Mover and Author of the work.”⁶² To what may have been their dismay, the Bible seems never to have been authorized in any form, suggesting that the king and his agents prudently avoided a direct endorsement: such a measure may have made the Bible too easy a target for confessional disputes. Instead, the goal seems to have been to let the new Bible fly under the radar by drawing as little attention to it as possible. It is therefore significant that the 1611 folio edition held in the University of Manitoba Archives bears the label “FIRST REVISED VERSION” on its spine. Although this initially seemed to me to be a mistake that must have been made at a later date, it may actually have been an early and accurate description: a point supported by the fact that the Bible was never entered into the Stationers' Registers, being only a revision and not a new translation.⁶³

The third thing to note about the title is that, like the rest of the title-page, it straddles the line between innovation and tradition, or between the old and the new: thus while announcing its newness, it draws attention to its continuity with the past, declaring that the

⁶² *The Reader's Bible*, p. x.

⁶³ Pollard., p. 61.

work was done with reference to the originals, but also that the translators worked closely with previous translations. There are at least two ways this pair of claims could be taken by readers, depending on the ideological positions they already held. The fact that the translators worked from the originals would have appealed to the Puritan faction who, as we saw, had argued that the previous translations were inadequate. By emphasizing the sound work that went into the new translation, the compilers sought to address the potential Puritan complaints before they had a chance to get off the ground. On the other hand, the “diligent” comparison with previous translations would have reassured conservatives that nothing too radical had happened. In other words, they wanted to emphasize that the influence of the familiar Great and Bishops' Bibles were still present, and that the Church of England was still the Church they knew and loved.

The top third of the title-page contains twenty-two figures. At the very top of this top-heavy scene is God, represented by his Hebrew name, JHWH—otherwise known as the Tetragrammaton. A few words are necessary to explain its appearance. English Protestants influenced by Calvinism believed that anthropomorphic representations of God were idolatrous, and they avoided the danger by removing images of God from their books. Calvinism, always a powerful force in English religion of the period, placed a heavy emphasis on the second commandment which stated, “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God.”⁶⁴ The persistent emphasis on the sin of idolatry contributed to an increasingly intense iconoclastic rejection of images, a violent

⁶⁴ Exodus 20: 4-5. *The Reader's Bible*.

and destructive movement that swept across England throughout the sixteenth century.⁶⁵ Although the degree to which this iconoclastic impulse actually permeated the popular visual culture of the period has been the subject of recent debate, there is little doubt that it accounts for the appearance of the Hebrew Tetragrammaton on the King James Bible's title-page.⁶⁶ If nothing else, it reflects the fact that by this time it was simply a given that God should not be represented in human form.⁶⁷

The rest of the figures are all relatively neutral, bearing little of the explicit political significance we saw in the Great and Geneva Bibles. Below the Tetragrammaton is a dove, representing the Holy Spirit who descends upon Christ in the Gospel narrative after he is baptized by John. Below the dove is another emblem, this time depicting a Lamb. The Lamb, an image of the risen Christ, victorious over sin and death, is surrounded by a glorious radiance. The appearance of all three members of the Godhead—the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit—is an implicit defence of the orthodox doctrine of the Trinity, a doctrine that was perceived to be under attack from heretical sects both at home and abroad.⁶⁸ But it was little more than implicit. On either side of the Lamb are St Peter and St Paul. Peter, on the left, holds the keys to the gates of heaven. Paul, on the right, holds a sword—a reference to the

65 See Margaret Aston, *England's Iconoclasts: Volume I, Laws Against Images* (Oxford, 1988).

66 On the one hand, there is Patrick Collinson's claim that an increasingly rigid rejection of images, which he identifies as "iconophobia", gained currency from around 1580. On the other, Tessa Watt has done much to correct the exaggerations of this claim, demonstrating that there was a strong visual devotional culture long after 1580. See Patrick Collinson, "From Iconoclasm to Iconophobia: the cultural impact of the Second English Reformation," in *The Impact of the English Reformation, 1500-1640* (London, 1997), pp. 278-308; and Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety, 1550-1640* (Cambridge, 1991).

67 Margaret Aston, in her essay, "The Bishops' Bible Illustrations" in *The Church and the Arts: papers read at the 1990 Summer meeting and the 1991 Winter meeting of the Ecclesiastical History Society* (London, 1995), pp. 267-85, shows that a number of images in the 1568 Bishops' Bible were printed from continental blocks which had been altered to remove the image of God, replacing it with the Hebrew Tetragrammaton. Therefore, even in this early "official" Bible dating from 1568, there was an awareness that God should not be represented in human form. The 1539 Great Bible, by contrast, does depict God as an old patriarch.

68 Corbett and Lightbown, p. 109.

sword of the Spirit, or the word of God. Next to Peter sits St Matthew. He is focussed on the image of the Lamb. An angel at his side is holding his inkwell as the Evangelist records what he is seeing. Next to Paul sits St Mark. He is also focussed on the Lamb, while a Lion rests beside him. Along the back row, surrounded by ominously dark and billowing clouds, are the remaining eleven disciples. Above them at the top left is the Sun; on the top right is the moon. The whole scene is apocalyptic, recalling the judgement day as it is described in the Book of Revelation, a point I will return to in a moment. I should say here, however, that the recollection of God's judgement suggests one more way that the Bible sought to establish unity: if the title-page was meant to appeal to Christians of all devotional persuasions, it was also meant to remind them of the swift approach of God's wrath, a point at which all petty infighting would quickly cease to matter. The *new* kingdom of God would then replace the *old* kingdoms of the world.

III.

Thus far I have considered the figures that appear on the title-page of the 1611 folio edition of the King James Bible. I have suggested that many of these images are best understood in the light of establishment efforts aimed at finding a way to mediate between the religious and political factions that had been troubling the English Church for some time. The goal, I have argued, was to help create a devotional space that was inhabitable for all, or nearly all. But what about the layout of the title-page itself? How does it construct the Bible's readable space? What kind of devotion does it encourage in its readers? This section considers the title-page from two related perspectives: first, it suggests that its architectural

structure creates the impression of an entry-way into the biblical text, recalling an entrance to a church, and second, it argues that the title-page presents the Bible as an entry-way into the heavenly city as it is described in the Book of Revelation.

We might begin by noting that the King James Bible's title-page is an example of the popular early modern form known as the "architectural frontispiece," a decorative format often meant to "symbolise the formal entrance to the work within."⁶⁹ These engravings appear quite frequently in English Renaissance books. Of the twenty "emblematic title-pages" that Margery Corbett and Ronald Lightbown discuss in *The Comely Frontispiece*, eleven unquestionably reference the architectural theme. Beginning with the 1605 translation of Guillaume De Saluste Du Bartas' *His Deuine Weekes & Workes*, the form accounts for all of the title-pages that they cite up to and including Henry Peachem's *The Complete Gentleman*, printed in 1622, a fact that suggests the form enjoyed a popular vogue for the greater part of a decade. Books printed with these title-pages include not just the 1611 King James Bible folio, but the duodecimo edition of the *New Testament* (1611), George Chapman's translation of *The whole works of Homer* (1616), an edition of St John Chrysostom's *Opera Graece* (1613), Sir Walter Raleigh's *The History of the World* (1614), *The Workes* of James I (1616), *The Workes* of Ben Jonson (1616), and Michael Drayton's *Poly-olbion* (1612-22). There were also later examples like John Bulwer's *Philocopus: or, the Deafe and dumbe mans friend* (1648). These title-pages vary somewhat in their appearances: some use closed arches, others use open arches, one even depicts what is very clearly the doorway to a long hallway with doors on either side (Bulwer's *Philocopus*). Many of these works were trying to establish their status as serious texts (the most notorious of which would have to be the *Workes* of Ben

⁶⁹ Corbett and Lightbown, p. 7.

Jonson, well-known for the audacious attempt to present his plays as “works”). In such cases the title-page was no doubt meant to lend authority to the text, recalling the stately grandeur of a classical temple or a triumphal arch. But the fact that the duodecimo edition of the King James New Testament also uses the format suggests that it was equally useful for the purposes of encouraging personal devotion, something I think has often been overlooked.

In a recent article, William Sherman suggested that the “architectural title-page” might function as a devotional aid precisely by recalling the entry-way to a church. Of the many texts he cites as examples, the most helpful for our purposes are George Herbert's *The Temple*, Christopher Harvey's *The Synagogue*, and John Bunyan's *The Holy War*. All of these texts, in one way or another, focus on the architecture of the church while making the comparison between the book and the building quite clear. For instance, at the conclusion of a four-page verse epistle “To the Reader” Bunyan writes:

But I have too long held thee in the Porch,
And kept thee from the Sun-shine with a Torch.
Well, now go forward, step within the dore.⁷⁰

Bunyan's use of the term “porch,” as Sherman points out, recalls the *church* porch, a covered entry-way that served as the first point-of-access to the church proper. The church porch figures even more prominently in the architectural conceits of Herbert and Harvey: “In Herbert, 'The Church-porch' is the first poem the reader encounters inside the book/building; and in Harvey, we begin with 'A stepping-stone to the threshold of Mr. *Herberts* Church-porch.’”⁷¹ The attraction to the church porch ultimately related to its familiarity as a threshold

⁷⁰ Quoted in Sherman, p. 76.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 77.

between the sacred and the secular:

For Catholics and Protestants alike, this space provided the starting point for most of the ceremonies marking important events in the life cycle (from baptism through marriage to burial). For early modern readers, then, the porch would be a familiar threshold—they would be used to moving through it as a transitional zone between inside and outside and between the quotidian and the sacred—and it would provide a particularly effective vestibule for readers being prepared for new textual content or form.⁷²

Because it was such a “familiar threshold,” the church porch became a popular metaphor for the entry-way to a book, especially when it came to books with devotional subjects. Sometimes this entrance was formed by a title-page, other times the role was filled by a preface or a first poem. The King James Bible's compilers clearly exploit this familiar metaphor, using their title-page as an invitation to enter the biblical text. By recalling the experience of entering the church building, the title-page encouraged its readers to assume a humble and reverent attitude. It was, if nothing else, a preparation for religious reading. Like Guillim's frontispiece, it was a formal entry-way into the text, a kind of threshold through which readers needed to pass in order to enter the word of God.

But the Bible's sacred architecture also implicitly points towards another even more important architectural place—namely, the city of God. So far as I know this connection has not been noted previously. Described in great detail in the book of Revelation, this city is a place of grand architectural flourishes. In a vision, John is shown “that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God.” As he narrates this vision, John describes

⁷² Ibid., p. 77.

everything he sees, neglecting no detail from his narrative, mentioning even the city's dimensions:

the city lieth foursquare, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he that measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and breadth and the height of it are equal. And he measured the wall therof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of the man, that is, of the angel. (Revelation 21:16-17)

The materials used in the construction of the city are also carefully noted:

And the building of the wall of it was of jasper: and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; the fifth, sardonyx... (Revelation 21:18-20)

And so on. But apart from these general observations about the city, there are a number of specific features that stand out if we compare the description in Revelation to the appearance of Boel's title-page. For instance, the four beasts that rest beside the four Evangelists are taken from Revelation 4:6-7: "and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast was like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle." The Lamb at the top of the edifice is the one mentioned in Revelation 5:6: "And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain." The twenty-four elders (there are twenty-four figures on the title-page including

the beasts, but excluding the images of the Godhead, the sun, and the moon) gathered around the throne are worshipping the Lamb, proclaiming: "Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation" (Revelation 5:9). It is worth noting that the opening of the book of life which corresponds with God's judgement is a unifying moment—every tongue, and people, and nation is represented, something that the compilers might have hoped would happen when their own book was opened, at least when it came to England. The sun and the moon at the top of the page, outshone by both God and the Lamb, recall Revelation 21:23-27:

And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there.

The mention of the gates here should give us pause for a moment. According to Corbett and Lightbown, the "architectural title-page" was often meant to represent a triumphal arch. They write: "there can be no doubt that the arch proper of these imposing structures was often regarded as a triumphal arch." But the triumphal arch was itself "an adaptation of the gateway into the walled cities of Roman times."⁷³ The form therefore recalled the gateway to a walled city, an important point if we consider Revelation 21:12-14, which describes the city as having "a wall great and high, and...twelve gates, and at the twelve gates twelve angels. And names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel:

⁷³ Corbett and Lightbown, p. 6.

on the east three gates; on the north three gates; on the south three gates; and on the west three gates. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Although the twelve gates have been reduced to one gate in Boel's design (out of necessity), everything else is present: along the top of the edifice are the twelve blazons containing the twelve tribes of Israel while the twelve apostles observe from above.

By recalling the gates of the new Jerusalem the title-page welcomed its readers into the communion of saints, reminding them to focus on the fate of their individual souls. This conceit was entirely appropriate for the Bible, a book that was believed to be the only pathway to salvation. As the “Epistle Dedicatore” declares: the Bible is an “inestimable treasure,” a book that is invaluable because it “directeth and disposeth men unto that eternal happiness which is above in heaven.”⁷⁴ Turning the focus away from the religious and political controversies of the time, Boel's title-page asked its readers to focus on their own devotions, imagining the Bible as the entrance to the heavenly city. It asked them to inhabit the book with proper reverence, keeping at least one eye on the future judgement. As the note “To the Reader” reminded those who would take and read the book:

It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God; but a blessed thing it is, and will bring us to everlasting blessedness in the end, when God speaketh unto us, to hearken; when he setteth his word before us, to read it; when he stretcheth his hand and calleth, to answer, Here I am, here we are to do thy will, O God. The Lord work a care and a conscience in us to know him and serve him, that we may be acknowledged of him at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, to whom with the Holy Ghost, be all

⁷⁴ *The Reader's Bible* (London, 1951), p. ix.

praise and thanksgiving. Amen.

To begin reading the Bible was the first step towards entering the kingdom of God, a kingdom which, like the Church of England, all were invited to enter. As readers opened the book, they were welcomed by the images of the gathered saints whose “fellowship” they were about to join. By turning the page and reading the book they had already begun to “participate in the heavenly nature,” to receive their “inheritance immortal.” It was, one supposes, a very edifying scene. And yet, for all the emphasis on the accommodation of all believers, the costs of refusing the invitation to enter the biblical text were high: “*They that despise God's will inviting them, shall feel God's will taking vengeance of them.*” Although readers were free to refuse entry, then, there was a high cost to pay if they did.

The title-page therefore does three things. First, it recalls the experience of entering the church, connecting Bible reading to church attendance, an important point for a Protestant Church Bible to make. Second, it recalls the gates of heaven, suggesting that reading the Bible and participating in the prayers of the Church was the only way to enter the fellowship of the saints. Finally, by remaining neutral in its choice of images the Bible encourages readers of all devotional persuasions to enter its pages and to join the fellowship of the English Church. Rather than focussing on ecclesiastical politics, as the Great and Geneva Bibles had done, the King James Bible turns its attention towards more devotional ends. Of course, in itself this was also a political gesture: by forging a neutral devotional space that could be inhabited by readers from different religious factions, Jacobean officials hoped to bring unity to the established Church of England. As I will show in chapter two, this was precisely their goal when it came to the Bible's publication in both large and small formats.

Chapter 2

“The Book thus put in every vulgar hand”: Bible Size and the Politics of Reading, 1525-1611

The title-page that opens Henry VIII's 1539 Great Bible stands in stark contrast to the title-page in the 1611 King James folio I discussed in chapter one. While the latter invites the people to read the Bible, the former makes it emphatically clear that the Scriptures should stay out of their hands. In fact, although the Great Bible was to become a powerful symbol for the nominally “reformed” Henrician Church, there is nothing suggesting that anyone below the religious and political elite would ever be able to read the Bible for themselves. The difference might be summed up as follows: if the King James Bible was directed towards religious accommodation, the Great Bible was all about power and control.

For instance, at the top of the page, Henry is seated on his throne.⁷⁵ On his left, Archbishop Cranmer kneels humbly with his head bared out of respect for the king, while on his right, Cromwell is doing the same. Both men are clearly acknowledging Henry's religious and political power as the king of England and as the head of its fledgling Protestant Church. Henry, convinced of their obedience, hands them both copies of his new English Bible, which bear the Latin title—*VERBUM DEI*—a surprising point, since this is a representation of the distribution of England's first authorized *English* Bible. Further down the page, Cranmer and

⁷⁵ Several good description of this title-page can be found. The best are in David Daniell, *The English Bible, Its History and Influence* (London and New Haven, 2003); David Scott Kastan, “‘The noyse of the new Byble’: reform and reaction in Henrician England,” in Claire McEachern and Debora Shuger Eds. *Religion and Culture in Renaissance England* (Cambridge, 1997), pp. 46-68; also Margaret Aston in her essay “Lap Books and Lectern Books: The Revelatory Book in the Reformation,” in *Studies in Church History* Ed. R. N. Swanson. 38 (2004): 163-189.

Cromwell return, now in full official religious and political capacity. They have also begun handing out copies of the English Bible to the lesser officials of the realm. Once again, the men receiving the Bibles are demonstrating their submission to their immediate religious and political superiors. On the left, Cranmer gives a copy of the new Bible to a kneeling priest who is exhorted in Latin “Feed ye Christ’s flock”—a clear command to perform his duty by preaching God’s word to the people. On the right side of the page, Cromwell hands a copy of the Bible to a nobleman whose head is bared, while he is reminded to “Eschew evil, and do good.” Along the bottom of the page we find those citizens who are at the lowest positions of power: a thronging mass of peasants have gathered round, proclaiming “VIVAT REX” and “GOD SAVE THE KINGE,” demonstrating their happy devotion to the all-powerful king of England. The point, though, is that these people never actually gain physical access to a copy of the Bible—instead, a priest on the left is preaching to them.⁷⁶ This, then, is a highly regimented image of the dissemination of God’s word, since possessing a Bible in this image is almost a sure sign that one also possesses religious and political power. Therefore, the title-page gives us every reason to believe that the publication of the Great Bible was primarily intended to affirm Henry’s authority when it came to reading the English Bible. It was certainly *not* intended to make the Bible easily available to the people.

Considering the title-page’s hierarchical representation of the distribution of English Bibles, it is hardly surprising that the Great Bible was only ever printed in the large *folio* volumes meant for use in churches. As we will see, there is a sense in which the history of the English Reformation is the history of Bible size, since the size of Bibles played an important role in determining how, and by whom, they were read. As Margaret Aston reminds us, “The

⁷⁶ This point is noted in particular by Aston, p. 178.

size of books has always mattered—both for manuscript books and for printed books. It makes a great difference to the fate of its contents...whether [the page] is in a heavy folio or a portable pamphlet.”⁷⁷ This chapter considers the politics of Bible size in the period between 1525 and 1611. It argues that religious authorities throughout the period understood that one of the simplest ways of controlling the Bible was to control the size in which they were printed. Therefore, they sought to limit the production of authorized Bibles, like the 1539 Great Bible and the 1568 Bishops' Bible, to the large formats meant for use in churches, effectively keeping the Bible out of lay hands. But reformers also understood the importance of Bible size, and the small volumes they tended to favour—like Tyndale's 1526 New Testament and the 1560 Geneva Bible—were printed almost exclusively in small formats meant for private use. Because of this persistent split between large (official) and small (illicit) Bibles, a corresponding tension had emerged between private and public devotion by the time that James I took the throne. Therefore, the publication of the King James Bible in both large and small formats was an important intervention into the political and ecclesiastical situation of the time. By making a single Bible widely available in large and small formats, Jacobean officials hoped to reunite private and public reading practices under a single official Bible and under a single national Church. Whereas previous regimes had attempted to keep the Bible out of the *hands* of the common people, Jacobean authorities sought to put an *official* bible into “every vulgar hand.” It was a gesture of accommodation that was meant to forge a moderate English devotional idiom, and an attempt to “reduce their” English “Countrymen to good order and discipline.”⁷⁸

77 Margaret Aston, “Lap Books and Lectern Books: The Revelatory Book in the Reformation,” in *Studies in Church History* Ed. R. N. Swanson. 38 (2004): 163-189, (p. 163.)

78 *The Reader's Bible* (London, 1951), p. xi.

Although the primary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the significance of the King James Bible's publication in both large and small formats, I spend most of my time examining Bibles from other periods, focussing in particular on Tyndale's 1526 New Testament, the 1539 Great Bible, the 1560 Geneva Bible, and the 1568 Bishops' Bible. My reason for taking this long approach arises from the conviction that the significance of the King James Bible's format can best be understood by placing it in the long tradition of English Bibles out of which it emerges. Each Bible I discuss reveals a slightly different conception about how the Scriptures should be read, which also reveals something about the religious and political attitudes of a specific time and place. It is only in the light of such a historical comparison that I believe the novelty of the an "official" English Bible put in "every vulgar hand" can be fully understood.

I.

Henry VIII did not like small Bibles. Or perhaps more accurately, Henrician officials felt that they were a threat to the order of the English Catholic Church. The obvious test-case for the Henrician policy regarding small Bibles arrived in 1526, when William Tyndale's unauthorized translation of the New Testament was illegally imported into London. Unlike the large Wyclifite manuscript Bibles that were its earliest English precursors, Tyndale's English New Testaments were all printed in small, portable formats.⁷⁹ They were, as Tyndale himself was often at pains to point out, books that were meant to be read by—or read out loud to—every man, woman and child, and not just by the religious and political elite. Their small

⁷⁹ See S. L. Greenslade, *The Cambridge History of the Bible: the west from the Reformation to the present day* (Cambridge, 1963), p. 141. He notes that there are over two hundred extant copies of the Wyclifite Bible, which we might note, were copied almost exclusively in large formats.

size made them relatively affordable to the average lay people who, even if they could not afford to buy a copy for themselves, might be able to pool their money together with a group of fellow believers in order to buy a copy that could be read out loud by, and to, them all. The point was to make the Bible widely available to a segment of the population who had not previously had much opportunity to read it.

The Henrician reaction to Tyndale's project was swift and negative, just as the Great Bible's title-page suggests it would be. The first edition of Tyndale's New Testament was begun as a small quarto printed in Cologne sometime in 1525, but it had to be left unfinished after the project was revealed to religious authorities by the anti-Lutheran controversialist, Johann Dobneck.⁸⁰ In order to avoid arrest (and possible execution) Tyndale abandoned the project and fled immediately to Worms. It was there, in 1526, that a smaller octavo edition was printed in a run of 3,000 copies, likely by Peter Schoeffer.⁸¹ According to a letter written by the aforementioned Dobneck, which described how he had successfully uncovered Tyndale's plot and reported it to authorities, Tyndale's plan was to "convey to England, secretly, under cover of other goods, the Testament so translated after it had been multiplied by printers into many thousands."⁸² If the Bible was going to have an impact on English culture, it would have to be able to avoid the authorities. Speed of production and portability were vital to the Bible's potential success. Therefore, it only made sense for the Bibles to be small.

Tyndale's plan succeeded. Within a few weeks, the London market was flooded with copies of the English New Testament, a disturbing fact for English authorities who were

⁸⁰ Pollard, p. 4.

⁸¹ A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible* (New York, 1968), p. 1.

⁸² Pollard, p. 104.

clearly overwhelmed by the sudden spread of these small, heretical texts, readily available to anyone who wanted one, no matter what their religious or political affiliations. Almost immediately, the bishop of London—Cuthbert Tunstall—sent out an official statement declaring that the unauthorized Bibles should be turned in to officials so they could be burned—and many of these Bibles (like their translator) met a fiery end.⁸³ Yet the Prohibition was unable to arrest the spread of these heretical books completely, and by June 1530, the illicit sale of Tyndale's New Testament had become such a problem that Henry issued a further Proclamation stating that

divers heresies and erronious opinions haue ben late sowen and spredde amonge his subiectes of this his said realme, by blasphemous and pestiferous englisshe bokes, printed in other regions, and sent into this realme...to peruerte and withdrawe the people from the catholike and true fayth of Christe, as also stirre them to sedition, and disobedience agaynst their princes, soveraignes, and heedes, as also to cause them to contempne and neglect all good lawes, customes, and vertuous maners, to the final subuersions and desolation of this noble realme.⁸⁴

This Proclamation emphasizes that these small books, like a noxious disease or infection, were making their way into England from abroad. They were being sent into the country by ill-intentioned Lutheran heretics who, officials believed, wanted nothing more than to undermine the good order of the realm and to destroy the spiritual and moral health of the English people. The Proclamation declares that the Bible's proprietors were working for the “final subuersion and desolation of this noble realme”—that they were planting the seeds “late

⁸³ The document is reprinted in Pollard, pp. 131-5.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 164.

sowen and spredde” for the total overthrow of the English Church and State. If Tyndale's Bible were to be left unchecked, officials felt, or if it were to be allowed to make its way into the hands of the common people, the fate of the country would be at risk, leaving England vulnerable to an attack from a powerful continental Lutheranism. To prevent this from happening, as the Great Bible's title-page suggests, it was necessary to keep the Bible out of the *hands* of the common people.

From the beginning, the Henrician regime made it clear that it did not want the Bible in the common people's hands. As the 1530 Proclamation declared, “it is not necessary the said Scripture to be in the English tongue and in the *hands* of the common people.”⁸⁵ This is a significant point, especially given the fact that Henry would eventually cave in and present the English people with a Bible in the English tongue in the form of his 1539 Great Bible, but he would only ever allow it to be printed in the large formats for use within English churches. In some ways, it was more important to officials that they keep the Bible out of common *hands* than that they keep it out of the common *tongue*. This is a difference in emphasis that yields some important insights into how the Bible was perceived at the time. It was almost as if the heretical disease were spread by physical contact with heretical Bibles, and that small Bibles, like invisible germs, made infection almost impossible to prevent. So long as the Bible—even if it was the Bible in English—were to remain in the possession of the Church, it could be protected from the kind of misuse it might encounter if it was in every person's hand. If it were to be read *to* the people by a priest, or if it could be watched by officials *while* it was being read by the people in the church, the dangers could be significantly mitigated. A Bible

⁸⁵ Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, eds. *Tudor Royal Proclamations, vol. I* (London and New Haven, 1964), p. 196.

in every hand would undermine this element of control.

Henry's stated concern regarding the matter was that if the English Bible were to be made available to the people, they would soon end up damning their souls and undermining the stability of the English Church: "the translation of the New Testament and the Old into the vulgar tongue of English should rather be the continuance or increase of errors among the said people than any benefit or commodity toward the weal of their souls."⁸⁶ Rather than providing any real benefit to the people, or correcting their erroneous beliefs, an English Bible could only lead to the further spread of heresy and to a corresponding growth in corruption and error. Henry offers the people hope that an English Bible might be made available to them in the future, but before that could happen, he suggests that the people would need to put aside all of the "peruerse, erronious, and sedicious opinyons" associated with "the newe testament and the olde, corruptly translated in to the englisshe tonge nowe being in print."⁸⁷ Given his efforts to stop the spread of Tyndale's Bible, though, it is clear that Henry was never very comfortable with the idea of an English Bible, and it is hardly surprising that he continued to do whatever he could to keep it out of the hands of the English people.

In spite of Henry's reservations, many of those around him felt that the laity should be given access to an English Bible, albeit with certain restrictions. In 1529, Sir Thomas More—a noted Catholic conservative who was beheaded by Henry VIII for his refusal to acknowledge the royal supremacy—laid out a plan for the limited circulation of an English Bible. In it, he suggested that "I never yet heard any reason laid why it were not convenient to have the Bible translated into the English tongue."⁸⁸ More's proposal suggests that an

⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

⁸⁷ Pollard, p. 168.

⁸⁸ S. L. Greenslade, "English Versions of the Bible, A.D. 1525-1611," in *The Cambridge History of the Bible; the West from the Reformation to the Present Day*. Ed. S. L. Greenslade (Cambridge, 1963), p. 154.

orthodox English translation should be made by English Catholics to counter Tyndale's heretical version. After the new translation was complete, all of the copies "shold come hole unto the byshopps *hande*. Whyche he maye after hys dyscresyon and wysedome delyver to suche as he perceyeth honest sad and vertuous."⁸⁹ It was vital to More's plan that the Bible should remain in the possession of the local bishop, or as More puts it, that it should remain in the bishop's *hand*. The bishop, using his wise discretion, would then be able decide who could and who could not read the Bible for themselves. Besides being "honest sad and vertuous," one had to promise to "vse it reuerently wyth humble hart and lowly mynd, rather sekyng therin occasyon of deuocyon [devotion] than of dyspscyon [disputation]."⁹⁰ The right to read the Bible, and to hold it in one's hands, could always be revoked "yf any be proued after to haue abused yt." All of this suggests that More's main concern was very similar to Henry's: that the English Bible should not be given to the common people without some form of ecclesiastical control. For some of the people (perhaps even most of them) More was convinced that reading an English Bible would have real devotional benefits—and as long as they approached it with humble hearts and serious minds, they were going to get something out of it. But as for those meddling "busybodies" who were prone to stir up debate at the local alehouse, or who were likely to preach divisive sermons at the market, they should not be allowed to have access to the English Bible, since they were in danger of damning their souls, and of disrupting the rest of the community. The Bible needed to be kept out of their "meddling" hands. In the face of such dangers, it was only the wise discretion of Church authorities that could maintain the stability of the community by determining who could and

⁸⁹ Pollard, p. 84 (Emphasis added).

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 85.

could not be trusted to read the Bible. More's plan had the limited merit of providing greater access to a Bible, while nonetheless keeping it under the direct control of the Church.

Of course, as More himself knew, his plan could never work. This was primarily because the people who often desired to read the Bible most fervently were precisely those who would never have been allowed to read it under the rules of his plan. It was often, as More himself puts it, “myche of the worst sort” that were “more feruent in the callyng for [an English Bible], than them whom we fynde far better. Whych maketh [officials] to fere lest such men desyre it for no good, and lest yf yt were had in euery mannys *hand*, there wold gret parell aryse, and that sedycyouse people shold do more harne therewyth, than god and honest folke sholde take frute therby.”⁹¹ For the reasons More lays out here, then, the Bible would remain largely out of common hands for the rest of Henry's reign. Although, as we will see in a moment, there was a brief experiment—and one that would ultimately fail—aimed at making the Bible conditionally available to the people, while nonetheless keeping it *within* the walls of the church. It was an experiment undertaken largely as an attempt to contain the threat of what seemed to be an English Bible come unhinged.

II.

Before the Henrician Reformation, then, there was what Margaret Aston describes as a well established “order of books.”⁹² Large Bibles, like the folios used in churches, were official and authoritative. More often than not, they were kept on a lectern in the choir, a part of the church reserved for the clergy. The distance maintained between the people and the

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 83.

⁹² Aston, p. 183.

Bible was in turn meant to emphasize the mediating role of the priesthood. As Susan Wabuda suggests, "The Church maintained that the Bible was food for the soul, and like the sacrament of the altar, had to be administered properly, by priests who taught orthodox views and interpreted Scripture properly...The laity should no more take the Scripture *into their own hands* than they should handle the Host itself."⁹³ In fact, as Paul Saenger points out, the size of the books and their placement in the church gave them a divine authority, and they often became icons in their own right.⁹⁴ On the other hand, small Bibles, like Tyndale's New Testament, were potentially subversive threats that were often criminally outlawed. In fact, ever since Arundel's 1409 *Constitutions*, the possession of an English Bible without a licence from the bishop had been a punishable offence⁹⁵—one that could lead to death by burning after the 1401 act *De heretico combuerendo*. The effect of this ban was to limit the circulation of the English Bible to those in the religious and political elite,⁹⁶ and to a surprising degree, this also meant that the Bible was usually copied in large formats for use in private libraries and chapels.⁹⁷ The small Bibles (or parts of the Bible) that would have been in the possession of the "lower sort" were the primary object of Arundel's ban which seemed to distinguish between Bibles of different sizes.⁹⁸

93 Susan Wabuda, "Triple Deckers and Eagle Lecterns: Church Furniture for the Book in Late Medieval and Early Modern England." *Studies in Church History* 38 (2004): 143-52. (Emphasis added.)

94 Paul Saenger, "The Impact of the Early Printed Page on the Reading of the Bible." *The Bible as Book: the first printed editions* Eds. Paul Saenger and K. van Kampen (London, 1999), pp. 31-51.

95 See Nicholas Watson, "Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of 1409", *Speculum* 70 (1995), pp. 822-64; see in particular, pp. 825-30.

96 See Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England c. 1400-c. 1580* (London and New Haven, 1992; 2nd ed., 2005), p. 80. Duffy writes, "the restriction of English Bible-reading to those who secured a licence effectively confined licit Bible ownership to wealthy devotees."

97 See Henry Hargreaves, quoted in Daniell, p. 90. Hargreaves writes, "The nobleman's fine copies were meant for, and doubtless remained unused upon, his library shelves." Hargreaves may exaggerate somewhat about how little the books were actually read, but the point that these bibles were acceptable to authorities largely because they were being used by a particular group of people, and in particular ways, nonetheless rings true.

98 Aston, p. 166.

After Henry's break with Rome, some things began to change, but there was also much that stayed the same. On the one hand, large Church folios continued to be official and authoritative, but lay access to them increased for a period of at least a few years. Rather than being kept in the church choir, they were moved into the nave—or in other words, into the laity's part of the church. On the other hand, the small Bibles for private reading continued to be potentially subversive, but as time went on, people began to grow more accustomed to them as they saw them being used. At least until the publication of the King James Bible, however, the two formats—large and small—continued to exist in separate devotional spheres, and although there was much overlap, separate devotional communities (Puritan and conformist) often defined themselves around their use.

The first cracks in this “order of books” appeared in 1538 when tentative steps were taken towards the installation of Henry's authorized Great Bible in English churches. Within three years, measures were being taken to repair the damage done. Before we get to that point, however, we need to consider the brief Henrician experiment which put the English Bible into common people's hands, albeit with important limiting conditions. In 1538, Cromwell issued a series of Injunctions on behalf of the king that were supposed to make an authorized English Bible conditionally available to the people. The third and fourth Injunctions required two things of bishops and curates. The first was that “ye shall provyde...one boke of the whole Bible of the largest volume in Englyshe, and the same sett up in some convenyent place within the said church that ye have cure of.”⁹⁹ The priest was to purchase a copy of the Great Bible, to prepare a convenient place for it in his church, usually in the nave, and to set the Bible up so that it could be read by all of the common people. The

⁹⁹ Pollard, p. 261-2.

Bible, previously only legally available in Latin, and usually only kept on a lectern in the church choir, was to be made available in English, and in the laity's part of the church. The fourth Injunction went further, though, declaring that “ye discourage no man pryvely or apertly from the readinge or hearing of the same Bible, but shall expressly provoke, stere, and exhorte every parson to rede the same, as that whyche ys the very lively worde of God.”¹⁰⁰ Not only was the priest to stop preventing the people from reading the Bible in English, he was actually to begin actively encouraging them to read the “lively worde of God.”

There can be little doubt that many people experienced this change as a disturbing reversal of the previous Henrician policy regarding the English Bible. There is, in fact, some evidence that there was an initial period of resistance to the new policy, as Henry was forced to issue a second Proclamation in May, 1541, which declared that “Hys royall majesty is informed that diuers and many Townes and paryshes wythin thys hys realme haue negligently omytted theyr duties in the accomplishment therof wherof his highnes maruayleth not a lytle.”¹⁰¹ Whether the failure to purchase an English Bible should be taken as evidence of a wide-spread resistance to the new policy, or whether it was simply a sign of parish thrift, is not entirely clear—David Scott Kastan, for instance, notes one parish in Hastingslight, Kent, which claimed that they “lamented the expenditure since ‘we have but one that can read it.’”¹⁰² It seems more likely, however, that the failure was related to the deep-rooted religious conservatism that remained current throughout much of the sixteenth century. Throughout this period, as Eamon Duffy has shown, many lay persons and clergy continued to harbour strong desires that things should remain as they had been before the break with Rome.¹⁰³ The

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 261-2.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 263.

¹⁰²Kastan, p. 54.

¹⁰³See Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*.

placement of the “Holy Bible” within reach of the “vulgar” hands of the common people clearly upset what were long-established hierarchies, making many of them uncomfortable along the way.

But if some were concerned that granting lay access to an English Bible represented a potentially fatal break-down in the proper order of their Church, it seems that many of their fears were shared by the king. Once again the Great Bible's title-page is suggestive for our purposes. There is a festive atmosphere to the title-page's scene, as the people celebrate Henry's magnanimous generosity for presenting them with an authorized English Bible. But the crowd almost seems to be on the verge of descending into a disturbing chaos, betraying what may have been Henry's real fears about the new English Bible: it might just as easily lead to civil war as to obedience and unity. Making the Bible available to the people was a risky gamble—a gamble that Henry was never very comfortable with taking. Therefore, the appearance of Newgate prison on the bottom right-hand corner of the page, noted in chapter one, gains an added significance: it suggests that the king was sending a not-so-subtle reminder to the common people (and to “uncommon” ones as well) that if they failed treat his Bible with respect, and if they failed to follow his orders, they would soon end up like the unhappy prisoners who were depicted staring through the bars of their cells. It was a clear reminder that Henry possessed the ultimate religious and political power in the new arrangement of the English national Church. Henry was hedging his political bets.

The Injunctions themselves make it clear that there were restrictions on how the Bible could be read. For example, the fourth Injunction includes the warning that the curate should admonish his parishioners, reminding them to “avoid all contention, altercation therein, and to

use an honest sobriety in the inquisition of the same, and referre th'explication of obscure places, to men of higher judgement in Scripture."¹⁰⁴ Although the Bible was being made available to the people, there were clear restrictions placed on its use: they were to approach the Bible humbly, avoiding arguments over interpretation, referring questions about difficult passages to those who were better trained. While none of these requirements were particularly repressive, the fact that it was felt necessary to implement such rules at all reveals the fears of English officials—that is, that making the Bible available to the people might lead to sectarian strife and religious discord.

But if Henry harboured fears about granting wide-spread access to an English Bible because it could lead to religious and political disorder, why did he agree to the proposition at all? A number of factors seem to have contributed to Henry's decision. For one thing, as noted above, Henry had promised to provide the people with an English Bible when a “convenient” opportunity arrived. Keeping this in mind, we should note that the decision to commission an English Bible directly followed Henry's split with Rome, which had itself led to a sudden and opportunistic realignment of Henrician interests alongside those of the Protestant camp—the group who could provide Henry with clear justification and much needed support for his somewhat unilateral decision. It was, in other words, a pragmatic attempt to gain Protestant support for his looming confrontation with Rome. The timing was certainly “convenient.” The fact that powerful conservatives like Thomas More had already suggested that giving people limited access to an English Bible might not be such a bad idea meant that Henry could take the necessary steps to gain Protestant support without appearing to have gone completely off the reforming deep-end. In fact, putting a large Bible in a

¹⁰⁴ Pollard, p. 242.

prominent part of the church was a relatively conservative gesture compared to putting small Bibles for private reading in the hands of the common people

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the placement of an English Bible in a central part of the Church was a way of re-appropriating the subversive threat of the English Bible as it had been embodied in Tyndale's Version, not only by legalizing a different Bible for use in churches, but by making it a recognized part of the Church's ecclesiastical furniture. From this perspective, the decision to authorize a translation was based largely on the fact that it was becoming increasingly clear to officials that it was no longer possible to *prevent* the English Bible from entering the country, and that another approach had to be taken. As David Scott Kastan suggests, "It was the incontrovertible evidence of the success of the heretical publication that finally led some in authority to suggest another tack. If an unauthorized translation could not be prevented from reaching England, England could authorize a translation."¹⁰⁵ Making the English Bible an official part of the established Church deprived Protestant radicals of one of their most significant rallying cries in the cause for religious reform. The goal was to bring a semblance of unity to the English Church by creating the perception that the Church was already substantially Protestant, without going too far down the road to actual reform.

What Kastan fails to note, and what I want to focus on here in particular, is that the *size* of Henry's Great Bible had everything to do with the achievement of his cause. For one thing, unlike Tyndale's small editions of the New Testament, which significantly remained on the list of contraband books, Henry's Great Bible was a Bible of the "largest and greatest volume." Like the large folio Bibles kept in churches before the Reformation, then, the Great

¹⁰⁵ Kastan, p. 50.

Bible was meant to appear official, encouraging the people to approach it with humility and respect.¹⁰⁶ In spite of its relative proximity to the people in the church, it was a book that continued to carry an aura of religious authority—it was still a large folio volume that was kept on a lectern inside the church and it would have been the Church's book in the minds of most believers.

This ingenious plan seems to have met with an almost immediate setback: rather than reading the Bible reverently as they had been instructed to do, many of the more radical Lutheran reformers began using the Great Bible as an opportunity to call for further reform—exactly what the title-page suggests officials feared might happen. For instance, on May 6, 1541, Henry issued the Proclamation noted above—that is, the Proclamation castigating churches for failing to follow his orders by neglecting to purchase a copy of the English Bible. Responding to what must have been the emerging misuse of the Bible, Henry suggests some ways that it should no longer be used:

not that any of them shulde reade the sayde Bybles, wyth lowde and hyghe voyces, in tyme of celebration for the holye Masse and other dyvyne seuyces vsed in the churche, nor that any hys lay subiectes redynge the same, shulde presume to take vpon them, any common dysputacyon, argumente or exposicyon of the mysteries therein conteyned.¹⁰⁷

Contrary to what Henry may have hoped, the English people had not been transformed into obedient subjects as soon as they were given an English Bible.¹⁰⁸ Instead, many began

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the authoritative nature of large volumes, see Aston, pp. 164-8.

¹⁰⁷ Pollard, p. 263.

¹⁰⁸ This, in fact, is what Richard Rex argues was the primary motivation for the publication of the Bible. Rex shows that Henry was being wooed by a Protestant group who argued that obedience to kings was taught in the Bible and that if the people were given the ability to read it, they would only become more obedient. William Tyndale's book, *The Obedience of a Christian Man*, is a prime example of the argument that

disrupting church services, reading the Bible in “hyghe voyces” during the Mass, and engaging in contentious debates—or in other words, doing precisely what they had been warned not to do two years before. In a last-ditch effort to make the arrangement work, Henry rebukes his subjects, asking them to avoid unnecessary disputes, reminding them that his initial intentions were that they should approach the Bible with a reverent attitude: “the Kynges royall maiestye intended, that his louynge subiectes shulde haue and vse the commodite of the readyng of the sayd Bybles, for the purpose aboue rehersed, humbly, mekely, reuerently and obediently.”¹⁰⁹ Once again the measures seem to have failed to quell the growing religious dissent.

By 1542 things had become considerably worse, not better. Officials therefore made the decision to begin cracking down on what they saw as the “peruerse” misuse of the English Bible. In that year, they issued a Statute that was meant to bring the people back into line by implementing restrictive measures on who could and could not read the English Bible. Its contents have been summarized by James Simpson as follows,

noblemen and gentlemen can read the Bible, or have it read to their families within their house, orchards, or garden; merchants can read it in private; noblemen and gentlewomen are allowed to read the Bible in private, though not to anyone else; no other woman, and no man below the status of merchant, is permitted to read the Bible, or, presumably, any other books banned by the Act.¹¹⁰

Each of the groups mentioned above were permitted to continue reading the English Bible, albeit with certain restrictions that kept it safely out of the public sphere. As long as the

Christians should obey their rulers. See Richard Rex, “The Crisis of Obedience: God's Word and Henry's Reformation,” *The Historical Journal* 39 (1996): 863-894.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 263.

¹¹⁰ James Simpson, *Reform and Cultural Revolution: 1350-1547* (Oxford, 2002), p. 498.

English Bible remained behind closed doors in the hands of the powerful and wealthy, it was not as great a threat as when simply anyone could read it. It is therefore all the more significant that a particular group of readers had apparently lost the privilege of reading the Bible altogether: "the 'lower sort' [had] so abused it," Simpson writes, "that in future no 'woomen nor artificers, prentices, journeymen, serving men of the degrees of yeomen or undre, husbandmen nor laborers shall reade...the Byble.'"¹¹¹ In fact, if we think back to the arrangement under Arundel's repressive *Constitutions*, we find that things were returning to the way had been throughout most of the fifteenth century. The parallels are striking: the only Bibles available to the common people were to be located within the church; they were the large volumes that they were not allowed to touch or read; and finally, those who were wealthy enough to purchase one of these Bibles were still permitted to read them in their homes, but they were not allowed to read them in public where they might stir up religious dissent. The point, then, like it had been before, was to keep the Bible out of the hands of the common people, maintaining a semblance of order by stifling open debate.

III.

In the years following Henry's death, the distribution of the English Bible fluctuated, but the distinction between large and small Bibles substantially persisted. During Edward VI's reign, there was a great proliferation of Bibles in both large and small formats and for both private and public reading. Reprints of Tyndale's New Testament, Henry's Great Bible, Coverdale's Bible, Matthew's Bible, Taverner's Bible, and Erasmus' paraphrase were all issued one after another. But this period of bounty was short-lived. When Mary took the throne in

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 498.

July, 1553, she immediately put a stop to the wild spread of English Bibles, returning things to how they had been before Henry's break with Rome, removing the English Bibles which had only recently been installed in parish churches.¹¹² But Mary's reticence led to the production of another translation of the Bible, a Bible produced by Protestant exiles who were living in Calvin's Geneva.

The first edition of what came to be known as the Geneva Bible appeared in 1557. Printed by Conrad Badius, it was—like Tyndale's Bibles—a small octavo New Testament meant “for the hand or pocket,”¹¹³ containing a series of marginal notes, or as the title-page declared, “*moste proffitable annotations of all harde places.*”¹¹⁴ Three years later a full edition of the Geneva Bible was printed by the English Protestant exile, Rowland Hall. Like its earlier counterpart, it was a small Bible—this time a “moderate quarto”—containing extensive marginal notes and a series of educational images that were meant to help illuminate the “harde places” of the text.¹¹⁵ The small size, along with the inclusion of notes and images, made the Bible more inviting to those who wanted to read it privately in their homes.

During Elizabeth's reign, the Geneva Bible was tentatively accepted by English authorities who largely felt that it was a good translation. And yet, many of them continued to harbour serious doubts about its use by the common people, primarily on account of what they saw as its potentially divisive notes. Contrary to popular opinion, the problem with these notes was not so much their obvious Calvinism, since Calvinism was rapidly becoming the accepted religious outlook of most people at the time.¹¹⁶ Rather, the problem had more to do

¹¹² Duffy, p. 530.

¹¹³ Daniell, p. 275.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., p. 276.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 291.

¹¹⁶ For an account of the wide-spread acceptance of 'Calvinist' doctrine during this period, see Nicholas Tyacke, *Anti-Calvinist* (Oxford, 1987).

with the occasional Presbyterianism that could be detected in some of them, since the Presbyterian movement was believed to be a threat to the hierarchy of the English Church—and beyond that, to the person of the king himself. For instance, at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, James identified a pair of marginal notes he found particularly offensive due to what he felt to be their anti-monarchical strain. As he put it, the Bible contained “some notes very partial, untrue, seditious, and savouring too much of dangerous and traitorous conceits. As for example, *Exod.* 1:19, where the marginal note alloweth *disobedience to kings*. And *2 Chron.* 15:16 the note taxeth *Asa* for deposing his mother *only*, and *not killing her*.”¹¹⁷ Regarding the second of these notes, David Daniell points out that “King James's mother Mary, deposed as Queen of the Scots when he was two years old, was beheaded in 1587, when James was twenty-one, at the command of Queen Elizabeth, for plotting insistent treachery. Her death was never far from his mind. He bruised easily.”¹¹⁸ Even if the lasting imprint made by his mother's death was a sign of “easy bruising,” it would nonetheless be easy to see why James may have felt that challenges to his royal authority were also a threat to his royal life. As noted in chapter one, James grew up in Scotland where, as Patrick Collinson points out, “the presbyterians were his ideological opponents, not afraid to tell the king to his face that the Church was not his kingdom but Christ's, in which he was a simple member and subject to discipline like any other christian.”¹¹⁹ If the fate of his son Charles is anything to go by, we might wonder what kind of discipline this may have involved.

In any case, because of the doubts harboured by English officials, the Geneva Bible

¹¹⁷ Quoted in Gerald Hammond, *The Making of the English Bible* (New York, 1983), p. 94.

¹¹⁸ Daniell, p. 434.

¹¹⁹ Patrick Collinson, “The Jacobean Religious Settlement: the Hampton Court Conference,” in *Before the English Civil War: Essays on Early Stuart Politics and Government* Ed. Howard Tomlinson (London, 1983), p. 30.

remained on the margins of the “official” English religious culture throughout much of Elizabeth's reign, although its popularity at the grass-roots level continued to grow rapidly, largely *because* of its convenient small form. In fact, over time, some Puritans began to hope that their Geneva Bible might actually become the official version of the English Church, and its popularity certainly suggested that this was likely going to happen.¹²⁰ For instance, despite the fact that the Geneva Bible was not printed in England until 1575—largely because of the persistent efforts of Archbishop Matthew Parker to block the Stationers' Company from ever gaining the rights to print it¹²¹—it still managed to outsell its rival, the Bishops' Bible, first printed in 1568. In fact, although the Bishops' Bible had been ostensibly commissioned by Archbishop Parker to replace the by now outdated Great Bible, his intention was more directly related to an attempt to find a way to drive the Geneva Bible off the market. However, Parker was uncomfortable with the small Bibles that could be used for private reading, and he therefore neglected to have his Bishops' Bible printed in smaller formats, sealing the fate of the Bishops' Bible, making it a resounding political and economic failure. As A. W. Pollard writes,

taking the most favourable view possible, it seems certain that the Archbishop cared little for private reading. He saw and met the need of suitable editions for the service of the church, but to use a phrase which, though it has a ring of the present times, is taken from the preface to the version of 1611 (where it is applied to the Roman Catholic position) he did not “trust the people” with cheap editions of the Bible, and his lack of confidence sealed the fate of the Bishops' Bible.¹²²

¹²⁰ David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 6.

¹²¹ Pollard, p. 40.

¹²² Pollard, p. 40.

Before Parker's death in 1575, only four editions of the Geneva Bible were ever printed—an octavo in 1557, a quarto and an octavo in 1560, and a quarto in 1570—all printed abroad. During that same period, however, only ten editions of the Bishops' Bible appeared, most of them in large folios and quartos meant for use in churches. The point, though, is that neither Bible was printed very much in the period, and that the market for small Bibles for private reading must have been far from being satisfied—suggesting that, if nothing else, Parker had missed a significant opportunity to endear his Bible to the English people. By neglecting to have his Bible printed in small volumes, he ultimately left the door open for the Geneva Bible to come in and take over the Bible market.

This is precisely what seems to have happened. After Parker died, and without his powerful hand to prevent it, the Geneva Bible began being printed in England. From thereon in, the numbers speak for themselves. In the first few years (1575-77) Christopher Barker, under the powerful patronage of the Protestant Sir Francis Walsingham, printed eight editions of the Geneva Bible—two in folio, five in octavo, and one in sixteenmo. These Bibles were part of a directed attempt to wrest the English Bible monopoly away from the queen's printer, Richard Jugge, who was only printing editions of the authorized Bishops' Bible. As Alister McGrath points out, “Sir Francis Walsingham—Elizabeth's secretary of state—and [the new Archbishop] Grindal conspired to undermine Jugge's stranglehold on the market for Bibles. While allowing Jugge to retain his monopoly on large (e.g., folio) Bibles, Grindal allowed others to produce smaller (e.g., quarto) Bibles.”¹²³ But Barker was printing both large and small editions of the Geneva Bible anyway, “ensuring that the Geneva version was available

¹²³ Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning, The story of the King James Bible and how it changed a nation, a language, and a culture* (New York, 2001), p. 128.

in formats suitable for both private devotion and public worship in churches.”¹²⁴ When Jugge died in 1577, Barker took over the Bible monopoly and he immediately began printing the Geneva Bible in large numbers. Between 1577 and 1583, in fact, nineteen editions of the Geneva Bible were printed—four folios, seven quartos, five octavos, and three sixteenmos. During the same period, however, only five editions of the Bishops' Bible were ever printed, suggesting that the battle for control over the Bible market had already been all but lost. Nonetheless, in 1583, when the more permissive Grindal died, he was replaced by John Whitgift, who was “anxious because of the growing influence of the Geneva Bible, which was now readily available in a number of formats.”¹²⁵ To deal with the problem as he saw it, Whitgift insisted that only the Bishops' Bible should be used in public services, but the Geneva Bible continued its rapid ascent, coming to dominate the Bible market outright. In fact, in the twenty years between 1583 and 1603 sixty editions of the Geneva Bible were printed while only twelve of the Bishops' Bible appeared. Moreover, only five of these Geneva Bibles were printed as folios while only five of the Bishops' Bibles were ever printed in formats for use outside of churches. There was, then, a growing disparity between the large Bibles read in churches (the Bishops' version) and the small Bibles read in homes (the Geneva version).

This disparity between private and public Bibles brought with it a number of attendant problems. For example, a note in many Geneva Bibles encouraged readers to take their Bibles to church in order to check up on the preacher's use of Scripture: “Take opportunitie,” it reads, to “Heare preaching and *proue* by the Scriptures that which is taught. Acts 17.11.”¹²⁶ The

¹²⁴ Ibid., p. 128.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. 128.

¹²⁶ Peter Stallybrass, “Books and Scrolls: Navigating the Bible.” *Books and Readers in Early Modern England*. Eds. Jennifer Andersen and Elizabeth Sauer (Philadelphia, 2002), pp. 42-79.

point of this exercise was to help readers grow in their faith, as the words from the pulpit were confirmed by the words on the page—or as the preface to the King James Bible puts it, “it was esteemed most profitable to cause faith to grow in men's hearts the sooner, and to make them to be able to say with the words of the Psalm, *As we have heard, so we have seen.*”¹²⁷ The popularity of the practice is confirmed by the title-page that opens Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, an image that depicts a group of believers seated around a pulpit, some of whom are holding small Bibles in their laps. No doubt, in a period which had witnessed several radical reversals in the religious orientation of the national Church, and where belief was increasingly becoming a matter of personal conscience, seeing the words for oneself must have been very reassuring. And yet, problems could easily emerge. What, for example, should one do if the words on the page failed to match up with the words from the pulpit? Should one follow the words of the preacher, or should one follow the words in the Bible? Because people tended to own the popular Geneva Bible, and because the Bishops' Bible was read in churches, this kind of problem emerged with what must have been a disturbing frequency. In fact, this may even help to account for the sometimes apparently inexplicable use of the Geneva Bible by many prominent establishment preachers at the time: rather than being an unambiguous sign of their preference for the Geneva translation, it may have been little more than a pragmatic attempt to avoid confusion (and the corresponding conflicts) by reading from the Bible that was used by most of the English people.¹²⁸

By the end of the sixteenth century, then, as James VI of Scotland was about to take the throne of England, there was what seemed to be a potentially dangerous “lack of

¹²⁷ *The Reader's Bible*, p. xx.

¹²⁸ David Daniell, for instance, takes the use of the Geneva Bible by establishment preachers as evidence of their preference for that translation. See Daniell, p. 295.

agreement between the Bible which men read in their homes and that which they heard in church.”¹²⁹ The fact that the Bishops' Bible was associated with the establishment Church, while the Geneva Bible was associated with moderate, but still marginal, Puritanism, meant that a sense of disunity continued to trouble the English Church as different religious factions were pitted against one another in their allegiance to different Bibles. It was, writes Pollard, a situation which “must have caused annoyance to both parties.”¹³⁰ In large part, this discrepancy can be traced back to Archbishop Parker's distrust of the small biblical editions that were meant for private reading, a distrust which mirrored, in significant ways, the distrust of both Henry VIII and Archbishop Arundel before. From the late fourteenth century, then, all the way down to the early seventeenth century, there was an implicit but systematic attempt to control how the English Bible was used, a control that was based, to a large degree, on an unspoken distinction between Bibles of different sizes.

IV.

This was the divided political and ecclesiastical situation into which Jacobean officials intervened with the publication of the King James Bible. From the beginning the new Bible was to be part of a larger policy directed towards mediating between opposing religious factions. The new translation was in fact first proposed by John Reynolds, a moderate Puritan in attendance at the 1604 Hampton Court Conference. James had convened the conference after being approached by Puritan activists on his way from Edinburgh to London for his ascension to the English throne. The Puritan ministers had presented him with the Millenary

¹²⁹ Pollard, p. 75.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p. 45.

Petition, a brief document containing a series of grievances regarding ecclesiastical and devotional issues which had been troubling them ever since the unsatisfactory (to their minds) reforms of the Elizabethan Settlement. By entertaining some of their concerns at the conference, James was hoping to establish a moderate consensus amongst his new subjects. In return for his efforts he asked that all of the parties involved should “work together in a spirit of moderation, mutual forbearance, and unity.”¹³¹ According to one Puritan account, James “exhorted the ministers to carrie themselves duetifull towards their Bishops; and the Bishops to deale fauorable with them, and more gently than euer they had done before.”¹³² In other words, both of the parties were to treat each other with respect, avoiding the kind of controversy that could lead to further argument and division. As W. B. Patterson observes, “The king aimed to find a middle ground between two widely separated groups in the English Church.”¹³³ The goal was to unify the English Church.

For the most part things seem not to have gone as well as James might have hoped, as the two groups remained locked in the same ideological battles with which they had begun. But there was one important outcome: near the end of the conference, after most of the Puritan concerns had been discussed and found wanting by the bishops in attendance, John Reynolds came forward with a proposition that caught the king's attention. According to one account, Reynolds “moved his Majesty, that there might be a new *translation* of the *Bible*, because those that were allowed in the reigns of *Henry* the eight, and *Edward* the sixth, were corrupt and not answerable to the truth of the Original.”¹³⁴ To prove his point he gave three examples—Galatians 4:25, Psalm 105:28, and Psalm 106:30—citing what he felt were crucial errors in

131 W. B. Patterson, *James VI and I and the reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 47.

132 Quoted in Patterson, p. 47.

133 Ibid., p. 48.

134 Quoted in Daniell, p. 432-3.

translation that made it impossible for those of the “godly” persuasion to assent to the Book of Common Prayer and to the readings used in churches. There is, however, an odd point to note about Reynolds' complaint. As David Norton observes,

The argument appears brief and weak: Reynolds has given three Great Bible readings, apparently ignoring the existence of the Bishops' Bible, which had corrected the sense in two of the readings. Moreover, if the problem was simply a matter of a few such readings, they might easily have been dealt with in the next printing of the Bishops' Bible. Many such matters had already been dealt with, so many that the successive editions differ markedly from the 1568 original.¹³⁵

Because of the eccentricities of Reynolds' petition, Norton concludes that “It may be that Reynolds' intention was to push the conference into accepting the Geneva Bible as the official Bible of the Church, for it corrects where he demands correction, and the two revisions he suggests are exactly those of the Geneva Bible.”¹³⁶ If so, Reynolds was hoping to unify private and public reading under the authority of a single translation of the Bible—but rather than uniting them under an establishment Bible, he wanted one that was endorsed by the “godly.” There was, however, little chance that James was going to authorize the Geneva Bible for use in churches. Instead, he took Reynolds at his word and ran with the idea for a new translation—it was, if nothing else, an opportunity to eliminate the Geneva Bible with the unintentional assent of the Puritans themselves. As William Barlow wrote, “his Highness wished that some special pains should be taken in that behalf for one uniform translation (professing that he could never yet, see a Bible well translated in English; but the worst of all,

¹³⁵ David Norton, *A Textual History of the King James Bible* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 6.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

his Majesty thought the Geneva to be.)”¹³⁷ The result was the eventual publication of the King James Bible, which was to embody this new-found spirit of “unity”—particularly, as we will see, when it came to the issue of Bible size.

The first edition of the King James Bible was a large folio “appointed to be read in churches.” Like the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible before it, it was an authoritative clerical book meant for liturgical use in the church. It was, in other words, exactly what one would expect from a Bible commissioned by a king. Later that year, however, a second edition appeared, this time a small duodecimo New Testament with none of the formal grandeur of its much larger counterpart—or in other words, a Bible in the tradition of Tyndale's New Testament and the Puritan Geneva Bible. Over the next eight years the King James Bible was printed in four more folio volumes, eleven quartos, seven octavos, five more duodecimos, a sixteenmo, a twenty-fourmo and a thirty-twomo. Altogether the period witnessed the publication of thirty-five editions of the new Bible—or sixteen more editions than all of the other version of the Bible printed in the period combined. In chapter three I will consider the economic motivations behind this massive glut of new English Bibles. For now, however, I simply want to briefly consider how the two editions managed to accommodate readers of different devotional persuasions, bringing a measure of unity to the English Church. To do this, I will return to examine the Bibles' title-pages.

In chapter one I discussed the title-page which opens the first edition of the King James Bible. Amongst other things, I suggested that it was meant to invite its readers into the biblical text, recalling the familiar experience of entering a church. This title-page, we should note, is found only in the first *folio* edition of the King James Bible, a book primarily meant

¹³⁷ Quoted in Daniell, p. 433.

for public liturgical use. Its magisterial layout perhaps makes more sense from this perspective: it would have been read in a formal ecclesiastical setting and it therefore needed to establish its clerical authority. Reminding readers of entering the church was a helpful way of doing this. The appearance of the gathered saints contributes to the scene's overall effect, representing the true Church, the fellowship of saints, or in other words, the body of believers the churchgoer joined by participating in the Church's communal worship. The title-page therefore implicitly connects reading the Bible with going to church, an important point for a Protestant "Church Bible" to make.

The title-page in the duodecimo New Testament suggests some striking parallels and some equally striking contrasts when it comes to how the two Bibles were meant to be read. For one thing, the architectural layout found in the folio title-page is reproduced, albeit with a few important changes. For instance, the two arched niches which had housed the figures of Moses and Aaron in the folio Bible are replaced by two tall pillars wrapped in ivy, surrounding the title which reads: "The New Testament of our Lord and Sauour, Iesus Christ." The New Testament figures who had crowded the top of the folio title-page are also noticeably absent from the duodecimo. In spite of these minor differences, there is a continued sense that the reader is being reminded that the Bible is like a temple, and that it should be approached with due humility and respect. There is, however, one more fundamental difference between the two title-pages: whereas the folio Bible is focussed on the communal nature of Christian worship, the duodecimo is more concerned with the devout prayers of the individual believer. It is a Bible for private devotion. For instance, at the bottom of the duodecimo title-page, David—the king of Israel who was believed to be the

author of the enormously popular penitential Psalms—is depicted playing his harp while praying his Latin prayer taken from Psalm 51: “Cor mundum crea in me Deus [Create in me a clean heart, O God].” At the top of the edifice are two kneeling figures who are holding their hands up towards heaven in devout prayer. On an altar between them rests a blazing heart, the symbol of the worshipful sacrifice of the truly repentant believer. The whole scene is meant to focus the reader on inner devotion rather than on outward public prayer, turning the devotional focus towards the individual prayers of the repentant heart. This is a significant shift in emphasis, especially given the persistent debates throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries over whether conformity to set forms of prayer or the spontaneous composition of one's own prayers were the “true” form of Christian worship. Those of a more Puritanical conviction, like John Milton, often felt that the use of set prayers was a kind of imprisonment of one's true affections, while those of the conformist strain, like Richard Hooker, felt that one's true affections needed to be helped along by the set prayers that served to train the sinner's heart.¹³⁸ The important point here, however, is that the King James Bible, published in both large and small formats and containing title-pages that focus alternatively on public communal prayer and on inward individual devotion, ultimately spans both of the positions on what was often a very controversial topic.

There is, then, an important sense in which the Bible's publication in multiple formats was the culmination of the inclusive Jacobean policy I sketched out in chapter one—a policy which sought to make the Church's Bible inhabitable for believers from diverse devotional backgrounds. As I argued, the compilers hoped to “reduce their Countrymen to good order

¹³⁸ For a discussion of the debates surrounding, and the practice of, common prayer, see Ramie Targoff, *Common Prayer: the language of public devotion in early modern England* (Chicago, 2001).

and discipline,”¹³⁹ or in other words, to find a way for different religious factions to exist peacefully alongside one another within the English Church. By providing access to a single Bible packaged for different readers, they managed to bring two devotional worlds together that had long been growing apart. In doing so, they helped to forge a moderate devotional idiom that could accommodate all, or at least most, believers at the time. The Bible therefore worked to establish unity at a material level, bringing diverse reading practices under the authority of a single translation of the Bible and under a single national Church—a fact that also helps account for the Bible's eventual hold on English culture: whereas previous official Bibles had only been read in churches, the King James Bible was also read in homes. Therefore, it was able to infiltrate both the public and domestic spheres. Stated in reverse, this may also help to explain the previous failure of both the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible: *because* they were only printed in the large volumes meant for use in churches, they were always going to be undermined by the small Bibles being smuggled into the country for private use. The only way to overcome the threat of the small Bible was to appropriate the small format, which is exactly what the King James Bible did. In the following chapter I will consider the economic motivations that contributed to the Bible's publication in both large and small formats, which in turn contributed to its economic success and its eventual hold on English culture for centuries afterwards.

139 *The Reader's Bible*, p. xi.

Chapter 3

**“A Bible of the Largest and Greatest Volume”: the King James Bible, the King's Printer,
and Printing Economics**

There is, I have argued, a common misperception that the King James Bible achieved its eventual cultural dominance “simply because it was the best.” Throughout this study I have attempted to correct this historical distortion, arguing that there were other factors that contributed to its long-term success. In chapter one I suggested that the layout of the title-page was meant to maintain religious and political neutrality, focussing on religious devotion and avoiding controversial politics, creating a devotional space that could be inhabited by readers of different devotional persuasions. In chapter two I argued that the Bible was part of a larger religious and political intervention that was intended to bring a measure of unity to the fraught political and ecclesiastical situation of the English Church at the time. By providing an official Bible for public *and* private reading, Jacobean authorities managed to unify two kinds of reading that had been growing apart since at least the early sixteenth century.

This chapter concludes by focussing on the economic and financial aspects of the Bible's production and reception. As it shows, Robert Barker, the King's Printer at the time, was faced with a difficult set of circumstances when he began printing the King James Bible sometime in 1610, complaining bitterly that “I do yet groan under the burden of this book.”¹⁴⁰

¹⁴⁰ John Barnard, “The Financing of the Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert Barker and ‘Combining’ and ‘Sleeping’ Stationers”, in *Publishing History* 57 (2005): 5-52 (p. 28).

The problems he encountered had less to do with the actual weight of the book than with the financial burden he was under, but the two issues were intimately related: as we will see, the size of the book was precisely what made it so difficult for Barker to shoulder the cost of its publication. Moreover, because he had invested a massive amount of money into the Bible's production, he needed to find a way to make it a commercially viable product. He stood to lose everything if he failed in this task. Following his father's lead (Christopher Barker was the printer who had popularized the Geneva Bible in the 1570's and 1580's by printing it in lucrative small formats), Barker began printing the King James Bible in small formats, hoping to achieve the same kind of popularity with the new Bible as his father had with the old. But if it had not been for a series of extenuating circumstances surrounding both Barker and the King's Printing House at the time, a series of circumstances that I will discuss throughout this chapter, Barker may simply have continued selling the very profitable Geneva Bible instead. If this had happened, there is a good chance that the King James Bible would have met the same fate as both the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible before it, being relegated to use in churches while the Geneva Bible continued to enjoy its massive popular success. There is, then, an important sense in which Barker's financial difficulties actually contributed to the King James Bible's long-term success.

This chapter begins by looking at some of the issues surrounding the King's Printing House in early modern England, including its many benefits and responsibilities. It then turns to the difficulties involved in the publication of large Bibles, ultimately showing why Barker needed to sell-off his stock of Geneva Bibles in order to finance the publication of the King James Bible. Finally, it considers the impact of publishing the King James Bible in both large

and small formats, comparing its eventual success to the dismal failure of previous “official” Bibles, like the Great Bible and the Bishops' Bible. The end goal is to demonstrate, as in previous chapters, that there were many factors besides the King James Bible's literary excellence that contributed to its long-term success.

I.

To understand the circumstances Barker found himself facing as he approached the prospect of publishing the King James Bible, we need to consider the benefits and risks that were associated with the patent he held as “Printer to the King's most Excellent Maiestie.” In Jacobean England, the office of the King's Printer gave its holder the “privilege to print statutes, acts of Parliament, proclamations, injunctions, the Bible in English, service books and other books wholly or partly in English.”¹⁴¹ In essence, this meant that he held a very lucrative publishing monopoly, possessing the sole right to print official books and pamphlets that were purchased by English churches and the Crown. These were two relatively good customers who could usually be trusted to make good on their debts, certainly not something printers could always expect from their customers. The patent also provided a relatively stable market, since the books protected under its terms remained largely invulnerable to the kind of market fluctuations that often threatened the businesses of other printers in the volatile English book-trade. As Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin suggest, at times of severe economic crisis (of which there were many in Renaissance England), most printers tended to fare very badly:

¹⁴¹ Arnold Hunt, “Book Trade Patents, 1603-1640”, in *The Book Trade and Its Customers, 1450-1900*, ed. Arnold Hunt, Giles Mandelbrote, and Alison Shell (Winchester, 1997), pp. 27-54 (p. 40).

At such times the book, a “luxury article”, ceased to sell almost completely, and printers had no other way of surviving than printing pamphlets expressing the public discontent. Books are always a hazardous enterprise to their publishers because their reception by the public remains so unpredictable, hence the anxiety to find a line for which demand would be fairly constant, church books, for example—the only item which would be sure of sale at a time of crisis.¹⁴²

Because he held the sole right to publish material that was meant for official religious and political use in England, the King's Printer remained above the fray that other printers often found themselves caught up in. If nothing else, the King's Printer could be relatively confident of the long-term success of his business, and so long as he managed things correctly, he was likely to make a good profit. In itself this made the King's Printing House an attractive commercial opportunity for a forward-thinking businessman who wanted a good return on his capital investments.

But the King's Printer had more than a stable market going for him. His tight hold on a large segment of the English book trade also meant that his turn-over was often surprisingly large. A sense of the scale of Barker's business can be gained from a lawsuit filed by Bonham Norton against other members of a Bible-syndicate of which he and his father were a part. In the lawsuit, Norton claims that the group made three purchases from Barker between 1610 and 1612.¹⁴³ The first purchase was said to have included 7,030 large folio Bibles, 14,496 communion books (Prayer Books), and 18,329 New Testaments in smaller formats. The wholesale value of this book-stock was set at £2,393 with a retail value of £3,590. Norton

¹⁴² Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *The coming of the book*. Trans. David Gerard (London, 1997; first ed. 1976), p. 115.

¹⁴³ This lawsuit has been discussed by several scholars. See Barnard in particular.

then claims that the syndicate purchased a second stock of Bibles from Barker later that year, this time including 4,000 large folio Bibles and 6,454 communion books. A third and final purchase of 3,862 large Bibles, 7,555 communion books, and 10,025 small New Testaments was alleged to have been made sometime before 1612. These figures suggest that Barker may have had as many as 72,000 religious books, mostly Bibles, pass through his private stock in the period between 1610-12. I will return in a moment to consider why Barker may have unloaded such a massive number of books between 1610-12. But for now, I simply want to draw attention to the enormous volume of books that Barker was capable of producing and to the capital he had invested in them.

Given the numbers provided by Norton, it is hardly surprising that contemporary estimates placed the actual value of Barker's printing monopoly somewhere in the range of £30,000, with a yearly income of at least £3,000.¹⁴⁴ Considering that the average annual income for artisans, tradesmen and lesser clergy in England was between £38 and £69 at the time,¹⁴⁵ the figure of £3,000—let alone £30,000—gives us some sense of the massive figures Barker was dealing with. The added fact that he held a monopoly on the books he sold meant he was able to set their prices at the highest level he thought the market could withstand—which, if the complaints of other printers at the time are to be trusted, is what Barker seems to have done.¹⁴⁶ Again, this made his business at least potentially very lucrative. The stability of the market, the high volume of books sold, and the near total monopoly he held on a large

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 6.

¹⁴⁶ There was a small tract entitled *Scintilla* published in 1641 by the London bookseller, Michael Sparke. In it, Sparke claimed that Barker and others who had held the office of the King's Printer had vastly inflated the price of the books they sold. In retaliation, Sparke imported large shipments of Geneva Bibles printed on the continent and sold them at a much lower price, undercutting the viability of Barker's business. The document is reproduced in A. S. Herbert's *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the Bible, 1525-1961* (London and New York, 1968), pp. 182-7.

portion of the book trade, made the office of the King's Printer one of the most coveted business opportunities in early modern England.

But there were problems. If the King's Printer had been able to print and sell books based solely on demand, or on what would have earned him the greatest profit, his business would have been almost totally invulnerable and enormously profitable. But the trade-off to holding the patent was the requirement to print some books that were much less profitable than others. For instance, printing a folio Bible was very expensive, and there was a great deal of risk involved in the process. John Bill once claimed that he and Bonham Norton lost "at least 1200.l every time they print ye Church Bible."¹⁴⁷ If Bill's figures are correct, and we will see in a moment that there is every reason to believe that they are, those were hardly the kind of numbers on which to base a successful business. Barker's father, Christopher, who held the patent before his son, had experienced similar difficulties when he undertook the publication of four folio editions of the Bible between 1576-8, three of which were editions of the Geneva Bible.¹⁴⁸ Reflecting back on the experience he claimed that

The whole bible together requireth so great a somme of a money to be employed in the imprinting thereof: as Master Iugge kept the Realme twelue yere withoute, before he Durst aduenture to print one impression; but I considering the great somme I paide to Master Wilkes [for the right to the patent], Did (as some haue termed it since) gyue Desperate aduenture to imprint fower sundry impressions for all ages, wherein I employed to the value of three thowsande ponde in the terme of one yere and an halfe, or thereabout: in which time if I had died, my wife and children had ben

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Barnard, p. 31.

¹⁴⁸ The comparison is made by Barnard, although he mistakenly alleges that all four editions were of the Geneva Bible: "the same difficulties Robert's father, Christopher, had found when printing and selling the first four folio editions of the Geneva Bible, published in England in 1576-78." pp. 27-8.

vtterlie vndone.¹⁴⁹

The Geneva Bible itself enjoyed a massive and enduring popularity in the following years, going through at least 140 editions between 1560 and 1640. It is said to have sold “more than half a million copies in the sixteenth century alone—making it, in all likelihood, the most widely distributed book in the English Renaissance.”¹⁵⁰ And yet, it remained difficult to turn a profit when printing this Bible in the folio format. We might therefore wonder what book could possibly hope to achieve a good return when it was printed in folio form, especially if this one could not.

The primary obstacles to the success of these large volumes were the high costs involved in their production and the limited market for their resale. I will begin, as Barker would have, by considering the costs involved. At least until the eighteenth century, the greatest expense in producing a book was paper, a material that accounted for at least 75 per cent of the total production cost of the average edition.¹⁵¹ The cost of labour—that is, the wages of the master, compositor, pressmen and apprentices—literally ate up nearly all of the remaining budget with their room and board. There were, of course, other expenses—including rent, interest on capital, and the maintenance of shop materials—but they were relatively minor considerations overall.¹⁵² All of these factors combined to make up most of the price of a book, with the printer's profit being about fifty percent of the total cost of production—or in other words, about a third of a book's price from the consumer's point of view.¹⁵³ It was always possible to lower the cost per unit somewhat by printing a larger

149 Quoted in A. W. Pollard, *Records of the English Bible: the documents relating to the translation and publication of the Bible in English, 1525-1611* (Oxford, 1911), p. 42.

150 William H. Sherman, *Used Book: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia, 2008), p. 71.

151 Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* (New Castle, Delaware, 1995), p. 177.

152 *Ibid.*, pp. 176-7.

153 *Ibid.*, p. 177.

edition (or in other words, a greater number of books), but there were limits to the actual benefits of such an approach, especially beyond a certain point. As Philip Gaskell suggests:

There were powerful economic reasons for printing no more than about 2,000 copies, just as there were for printing at least 500. As the quantity increased the printer's capital investment, which was always alarmingly high, rose with it, and his profits as a percentage of investment fell. Quite a small edition of a sizeable book could take as much as two years to print, and it was usual to allow credit to customers for several months after delivery; similarly, whoever bought the paper had to put up a lot of money for a long time. If, therefore, the average edition quantity was increased without a corresponding enlargement of the printer's productive capacity, the result was higher interest charges and lower profits; and the printer could not enlarge his productive capacity beyond a certain point without enlarging his plant, which again meant increased overhead costs.¹⁵⁴

The publication of any book at the time involved some risk, but the larger the book, the greater the initial investment, and by extension, the more precarious the risks involved. It was simply a matter of scale: a large book required more paper and took more time for the compositor to set, thus increasing the overall cost of the total investment needed to see it through the presses. The investment made on a large book tended to become so costly that the sale of these books (usually much slower than those printed in popular small formats) often could not cover the interest paid on borrowing. Gaskell and Bill both agree on this point: Bill claimed that the problem with printing a large Bible was that they “never sell for

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 161.

their Interest of their money & loose their principal.”¹⁵⁵ In any case, the printer's ability to absorb the costs of production and to turn a profit tended to decrease as the size of a book grew. It has even been remarked that “Bible printing could not be successfully undertaken except by a man with great financial resources, and these liquid enough for him to make a heavy investment and to wait for slow returns.”¹⁵⁶ Few but the King's Printer could afford to make this kind of investment.

When it came to the King James Bible, the problems involved were greatly compounded, increasing the risks Barker took on when he agreed to begin publishing it. Part of this had to do with the initial cost of the materials he needed to purchase before the printing process began, which, in the case of the King James Bible, were much higher than they had been for most previous folio editions. For instance, the King James folio required fifty more sheets of paper than the Geneva Bible Barker had printed the year previously, which meant that it used 366 sheets in all.¹⁵⁷ That was already a fourteen per cent increase in the total volume of paper, a major issue considering that it was already the most expensive component of a book. But the new Bible also “used much larger sheets, nearly double the size of those required for a normal Geneva Bible in folio.”¹⁵⁸ Therefore, the cost of the paper Barker needed to purchase before he even began the printing process had already set him back a considerable degree. Moreover, because this was the first edition of the new Bible, the copy had to be newly cast-off and the book had to be designed—expenses that were only incurred with the publication of a first edition. But in themselves, these were all relatively minor considerations, at least when compared to the one other major investment Barker had

¹⁵⁵ Barnard, p. 31.

¹⁵⁶ P. M. Handover, *Printing in London from 1476 to Modern Times* (London, 1960), p. 80.

¹⁵⁷ Barnard, p. 28.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

to make: according to contemporary accounts, he was required to purchase the manuscript from which he would set the text—a purchase that was said to have set him back as much as £3500, which was more than his considerable annual income.¹⁵⁹ In today's figures, that would be an investment in the neighbourhood of £350,000—a very large sum to pay for the rights to a book that has yet to be proven on the open market.¹⁶⁰ There was, however, to be no support from James or the Church, so Barker had to provide the funds himself, which gives us some sense of the issues that Barker was dealing with and of the risks he faced. Barker, as the King's Printer, was of course used to dealing with large sums, but even so, this was a particularly risky venture, and it would ultimately ruin his business.

How did Barker find the necessary capital to fund the Bible's printing? For one thing, he could not have had that kind of money just laying around, since most of his capital was either tied up in his book stock, or else it was being reinvested into his shop, his materials, and in the production of new editions. More importantly, the sum was more than his estimated annual income of £3,000. He must therefore have had to find the funds elsewhere. Until recently, it was believed that Barker came up with the money by organizing a partnership with John Norton and his Bible syndicate, borrowing the funds he needed from the group in return for a promised percentage of the Bible's future sales.¹⁶¹ This, however, is not quite how things seem to have happened, and because there were important consequences

159 A. W. Pollard suggests that the money may have been paid directly to the translators, which would have represented a payment of between £50–£60 per scholar. See his, *Records of the English Bible: The documents relating to the translation and publication of the Bible in English, 1525–1611* (Oxford, 1911), p. 57.

160 Barnard, p. 6.

161 See, for example, Alister McGrath *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York, 2001). McGrath writes: Barker “sought partners in the venture. John Bill, Bonham Norton, and John Norton duly signed up, and the capital required was made available,” p. 199.

tied to the events as they actually unfolded, I will consider them briefly here.

In a recent article, “The Financing of the Authorized Version 1610-1612: Robert Barker and 'Combing' and 'Sleeping' Stationers,” John Barnard demonstrates that Barker, rather than simply handing over the rights to a portion of his profits from the sale of the King James Bible, was forced to sell-off a massive stock of books (a transaction recorded in the lawsuit brought forward by Bonham Norton mentioned above) to John Norton and his Bible syndicate. He writes:

In October 1610, Robert Barker definitely sold a large portion of his stock at wholesale rates to a partnership of seven stationers for just over £2,390...Barker then sold a second block to the partners between that date and 1612, worth £1,165...That represents a very substantial injection of over £3,500 worth of capital into Barker's business at this period. In addition, Barker probably sold a third block, this time including copies of the Authorized version in folio (and perhaps in quarto and octavo as well), for approximately £3,458 at wholesale prices...It is possible, then, that Barker sold more than £6,900 worth of his stock at wholesale prices.¹⁶²

The important point to note for our purposes is that if Barker had simply been able to *borrow* the money from John Norton and his partners, he would still have been able to make a solid profit on the continued sale of his Bible stock—that is, the 72,000 Bibles he sold for £6,900 to the partners, but which could have been sold for at least £10,350 on the retail market. Of course, this meant that he would end up making smaller profits from the new King James Bible, since the money he earned from its sale would have to be split between the syndicate's partners. But it would still have been a worthwhile business venture. On the other hand, by

¹⁶² Barnard, pp. 21-2.

selling his entire stock of Bibles at wholesale prices, perhaps even before many of them were finished being printed, he was foregoing a substantial long-term gain that would have earned him as much as £3,500. Under this arrangement, all he could hope to do would be to break even on the sale of the 72,000 books, and to free up the necessary capital he needed simply to reinvest it back into the publication of the new King James Bible. The problem with doing things this way, besides being a lot of work for no return, was that he was essentially handing over a massive number of Bibles to his competitors, who were going to sell those Bibles in the very same market Barker depended upon for his own livelihood. The sale of the Bibles to the syndicate meant that the market would be glutted with Bibles that Barker himself had printed, but from which he would see no profit. Barker was making things much more difficult for himself, supplying his competitors with the means to take-over his monopoly (which is, in fact, precisely what happened in 1618). It was hardly a favourable arrangement, and John Barnard suggests that Barker would never have willingly agreed to its terms if there had been any other viable option.¹⁶³ Norton's Bible syndicate likely had him cornered.

It should therefore come as no surprise to learn that Barker complained of the troubles he encountered in printing the new Bible in folio. Before he had even begun selling it he was facing serious difficulties, and if things were difficult at this early stage they would only get worse. This brings us to what was the relatively limited market for folio Bibles in early modern England. One might expect that there would be a solid market for a Bible commissioned by the king and destined for use in churches. But the evidence shows that the sales were never very good. For instance, "Barker produced a folio edition in 1611, and a second within the same year, the sheets of which had to be reissued with the third edition of

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 29.

1613—which means that the first edition, probably of 1,000 copies or less, had more than met the demand.”¹⁶⁴ After that, another folio edition was printed in 1617, but then no other editions appeared until 1634. Such a long time-lapse between editions suggests that the stockpile from a single print-run of a folio edition of the King James Bible lasted about two to four years during the initial period (from 1611 to about 1617). But once the need for new church Bibles was satisfied sometime after 1617, a large number of copies sat around waiting to be sold, perhaps for as long as seventeen years—certainly not a negligible length of time to wait for a return on a large investment.

The slow sales were probably related to the ecclesiastical effort (or lack of effort), noted in chapter one, which was aimed at making the new Bible appear as neutral as possible, allowing it to go largely unnoticed in the heated religious and political climate of the time. Rather than demanding that each parish purchase a copy of the new Bible, a measure that would almost certainly have been perceived by many of the poorer parishes as an oppressive burden imposed on them from above (but which would have guaranteed Barker a good return), the bishops and the king decided to let it slowly penetrate the English countryside as the need for new Church Bibles naturally arose. As A. W. Pollard points out,

It would have been highly unpopular to force an expenditure of this kind on every parish, however small. To do so, moreover, would have been alike impolitic and needless; impolitic, because any haste in the matter would have suggested that very slur on the Bishops' Version which the preface so earnestly disclaims; needless, because the supply of Bibles being, as we have pointed out, a regulated and controlled supply, whenever an old Church Bible was worn out, it was necessarily replaced by a

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 28.

new one of the version of 1611, because no other Bible in large folio was purchasable.¹⁶⁵

In itself this was a good political policy, but it was hardly the best way to sell a Bible; and things had definitely been done differently at other times. For instance, when Cromwell issued his 1539 Injunction that every parish should purchase a Bible for use in Henrician churches, it was quickly followed by a Proclamation from the king himself, warning of a fine for failing to follow the orders. This 1541 Proclamation declared that Henry

doeth straytle charge and commaunde that the Curates and paryshioners of euery towne and paryshe wythin thys hys realme of Englande, not hauynge already Bybles prouyded wythin theyr paryshe churches, shall on thys syde of the feaste of Alsayntes next commynge, bye and prouyde Bybles of the largest and greatest volume...vpon payne that the Curate and inhabitauntes of the paryshes and townes, shal lose and forfayte to the Kynges maiestye for euery moneth that they shall lacke and want the sayde Bybles, after the same feast of Alsayntes fourty shylynges.¹⁶⁶

Half of the forty shillings were to go to the king; the other half were to be given to the individual who “shall fyrste fynde and present the same to the Kynges maiestyes counsayle.”¹⁶⁷ Aside from providing an incentive to buy the new Bible, this last measure had the added benefit of turning the people into a potentially self-policing body of suspicious witnesses who would spy on their fellow parishioners on behalf of the king. To sweeten the deal, the Privy Council arbitrarily set the price of the Bible at a meagre 10s. unbound, which meant that buying a copy of the Bible was a lot cheaper than paying the monthly 40s. fine.

¹⁶⁵Pollard, p. 65-6.

¹⁶⁶The proclamation is published in Pollard, pp. 261-5.

¹⁶⁷Ibid., p. 264.

There were therefore strong incentives for buying Henry's Bible, and its printers, Richard Grafton and Edward Whitchurch, were able to sell something like 20,000 of them between 1539 and 1541.

A similar intervention was made on behalf of the Bishops' Bible by Archbishop Whitgift in a letter he sent to the Bishop of Lincoln in July, 1587:

Whereas I am credibly informed that divers, as well as parish churches, as chapels of ease, are not sufficiently furnished with Bibles, but some have either none at all, or such as be torn and defaced, and yet not of the translation authorized by the synods of bishops: these are therefore to require you strictly in your visitations, or otherwise, to see that all and every the said churches and chapels in your diocese be provided of one Bible, or more, at your discretion, of the translation allowed as aforesaid, and one book of Common Prayer, as by the laws of this realm is appointed.¹⁶⁸

Although the fortunes of the Bishops' Bible were already on the downswing, this was a last attempt to force its success. But even if the measure ultimately failed to help the Bishops' Bible, it at least gave the King's Printer a fighting chance to sell the copies he had printed in a relatively short time-span.

Without the aid of an Injunction of this kind, Barker was unable to sell nearly as many copies of the folio King James Bible in the first few years of printing it. In fact, the four folio editions he issued between 1611 and 1617 were likely of between about 1,000 and 2,000 copies apiece. If this figure is correct, it would mean that he only printed between 4,000 and 8,000 copies altogether—certainly many less than the 20,000 copies of the Great Bible printed by Grafton and Whitchurch. There is, it should be noted, some disagreement about

¹⁶⁸Quoted in Pollard, p. 44.

how large the editions Barker printed actually were. It was once assumed that Barker *did* print enough Bibles to supply each of the parishes with a copy—in other words, about 20,000 altogether. But this was an assumption based on a serious misunderstanding of the relatively lenient ecclesiastical policy regarding the new Bible, a policy that did not force the parishes to purchase the Bible at all. As A. W. Pollard writes, “misapprehension of the ecclesiastical position has indeed caused some bibliographers to go astray, and to imagine the simultaneous printing of two issues to meet a demand for 20,000 copies.”¹⁶⁹ Pollard instead estimates that the editions may have been “of as many as 5,000 apiece.”¹⁷⁰ But given Gaskell's point that there were few benefits to printing editions of more than 2,000 copies at a time, John Barnard's more conservative estimate of around 1,000 copies per edition seems more likely. There was no guarantee that the Bibles would sell (as there had been for the Great Bible), and it is therefore likely that Barker would have wanted to avoid going further into debt by printing only a small number of copies each time, at least at this early stage of the process.

This was the unfavourable situation Barker faced as he approached the prospect of publishing the King James Bible. He had sold off most of his Bible stock, including many Bibles that had yet to be printed,¹⁷¹ which meant he had to keep up the work of producing them without the promise of any financial gain. To make matters worse, the Bible he was printing was very costly to produce, in part because of its size, but also because of the £3,500 he had to pay for the rights to begin printing it. Moreover, in spite of the costs he incurred, Barker received almost no support from the Church or State, not even in the form of the

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 66.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 67.

¹⁷¹ H. R. Plomer, in “The King's Printing House under the Stuarts”, *The Library*. 2.2 (1909): 353-75 (362), writes that Barker “very unadvisedly used (for present money) to sell his books...before they were half printed.”

Injunctions that previous folio Bibles had enjoyed. If the sales of the folio Bible could have supported the venture, things might have come out quite differently. But because they were almost guaranteed to be a losing investment, Barker's prospects were looking bleak.

This is why Barker decided to print the King James Bible in large and small formats. In some ways, he really had no other option. It was simply a matter of cost. He needed the money from the sale of the small Bibles to finance the publication of the large ones. Moreover, because the market was already flooded with copies of the Geneva Bible that were being sold by his rivals (but which were being printed by himself), his only real option was to begin popularizing the new King James Version. It was the one opening he could find in an otherwise tight Bible-market. If the records of the Bibles he printed throughout the period are any indicator of popular demand at the time, they show that Barker did manage to sell quite a few small King James Bibles in the years immediately following its first publication.¹⁷² For instance, in 1611, he printed two editions of the King James Bible—one in folio and one in duodecimo. In 1612, he printed a quarto, an octavo, and a New Testament in quarto. This was still a relatively tentative beginning, but things were soon on the up-swing. In 1613, he printed two folios, three quartos, and one octavo—or six editions in all—which suggests that there must already have been a relatively strong demand for the smaller editions, in spite of the persistent availability of the Geneva Bible for a number of years afterward. In fact, by this time it seems that the King James Bible was already on its way towards displacing the Geneva Bible in terms of popular sales, since the number of Geneva editions being printed had already dropped from about four or five editions a year to about two or three. This change in fortunes may have been why, in 1616, officials encouraged the King's Printer to

¹⁷² See A. S. Herbert, *Historical Catalogue of Printed Editions of the English Bible 1525-1961* (London, 1968).

“print no more Geneva Bibles.”¹⁷³ Perhaps they saw the success Barker was having with the publication of the King James Bible in the popular small formats, once completely dominated by the Geneva Bible. They may have recognized an opportunity to eliminate the Geneva Bible once and for all, or in other words, to finally succeed where Archbishop Parker had failed thirty years earlier with the publication of his Bishops' Bible. Otherwise, it is hard to explain why they would not have acted sooner by asking Barker not to print the Geneva Bible from the beginning. Whatever their motivation, from this point on there was no longer any real doubt that the King James Bible was going to become the dominant version of the English Bible, in spite of the reservations that many people felt towards it.

And yet, for all of the venture's success, it is entirely possible that if Barker had not faced this particular set of difficult circumstances when publishing the King James Bible, he may have simply gone on selling Geneva Bibles and the King James Bible may have met the same fate as the Great Bible and Bishops' Bible before it. The dominance of the King James Bible may therefore have been more related to the sheer determination of its first printer, Robert Barker, who was struggling to find a way to keep his sinking business afloat. Of course, in the end, Barker himself never benefited from the growing sales of the King James Bible: because of the mismanagement of his business holdings after the costs he incurred while printing the new Bible, and because of an ongoing feud with Bonham Norton, Barker would eventually lose the office of King's Printer in 1618.¹⁷⁴ Although he would later regain it for a short period in 1619, he would lose it again in 1620, finally ending up in debtors prison in 1635 where he would stay until his death ten years later. But in spite of all of

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 73.

¹⁷⁴ The ongoing feud is discussed in David Daniell, *The English Bible, Its History and Influence* (London and New Haven, 2003), pp. 454-5.

Barker's ill-fortune, he had managed to lay the ground-work for the King James Bible's success, and in the following years its popularity would continue to grow without him. In 1637, Archbishop Laud finally banned the further importation of the Geneva Bible from Amsterdam, citing the concern that "by little and little printing would be carried out of the kingdom...And to preserve printing here at home...was the cause of stricter looking to those Bibles."¹⁷⁵ By this point the economic concerns of the King's Printer were no longer separable from the political and ecclesiastical concerns of the English Church. It was important for ecclesiastical authorities to support the King's Printer because the King's Printer supported the King James Bible. Their fates were now intertwined.

It is clear why Barker's decision to publish the King James Bible in small formats made such a difference to its eventual dominance of the Bible market, especially when compared to previous "official" versions. As noted in chapter two, Archbishop Parker seems to have intentionally blocked the publication of his Bishops' Bible in the smaller formats meant for private reading. By imposing this silent ban he inadvertently left the door open for the Geneva Bible to come in and take over the market, a decision that would ultimately lead to the Bishops' Bible's failure. In fact, it had been Robert Barker's father, Christopher, who had himself undertaken the publication of the Geneva Bible that led to the Bishops' Bible's surpassing. His success in that venture can be directly tied to his decision to publish the Bible in small formats for popular use. It was a smart move for at least two reasons: first, it allowed the Bible to grow on people as they read it in their homes, popularizing the translation by making it the most convenient and familiar translation available for private use; and second, it was ultimately what made the Bible printing business a lucrative endeavour,

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in David Norton, *A History of the English Bible as Literature* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 91.

since it tapped a large market that had long gone unsatisfied. It may have been that Robert Barker had learned from his father's experience and that he knew that the only way to really popularize a translation was to put it in the people's hands. Because he had a considerable vested interest in seeing the success of the King James Bible, this is precisely what he proceeded to do.

The long-term success of the King James Bible can therefore be attributed to the three intertwined forces of religion, politics, and economics. When work on the new Bible was begun, it was part of a larger religio-political program that was meant to "reduce their Countrymen to good order and discipline."¹⁷⁶ But in order accomplish this goal, the Bible had to be devotionally neutral so that it could be inhabited by all believers, or, as the preface to the Bible suggests, so that it might "not justly to be excepted against" by any of the devotional groups.¹⁷⁷ But if this Bible was going to have the legs to survive, it would also have to be able to support itself as a marketable commodity; and in this sense, the economic motivations of the King's Printer were directly in line with those of the Church and the State: it was in all of their best interests that the Bible should become commercially successful. Otherwise, it would simply end up losing out to its competition, which is precisely what had happened to its predecessors. Passing a law or issuing an Injunction were never going to make the Bible succeed: business being business, there were always going to be those, like the printers who produced Tyndale's New Testament, or those who had smuggled the Geneva into England from abroad, who were willing to take a serious risk in order to make a financial profit. As long as there was a demand to read the Bible, a demand that remained remarkably

¹⁷⁶ *The Reader's Bible* (London, 1951), p. xi.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xxiv.

strong for centuries, it would be a perilous decision to try to suppress its use.

This, then, is what made the King James Bible such a massive success. By providing a translation of the Bible packaged for different readers it managed to begin unifying the English people under a single national Bible and a single national Church. The establishment of a unified biblical idiom emphasized the cohesive nature of the English Church and its inclusive, if somewhat undisciplined, structure. As Patrick Collinson observes, “For all its evident imperfections, the Jacobean Church had the capacity to contain within its loose and sometimes anomalous structures vigorous forms of voluntary religious expression.”¹⁷⁸ Rather than needing to turn to external, and to potentially subversive, sources in order to satisfy their devotional needs, those of the “godly” persuasion were more able to find ways to worship peacefully within the established Church of England. As W. B. Patterson observes regarding the Hampton Court conference—making a point that is equally applicable to the King James Bible, the conference’s principal result,

The king was looking for a compromise which the two parties would find acceptable. To a large extent he succeeded. As the voluminous literature on Puritanism in England during the early seventeenth century indicates, the religious outlook called Puritan did not disappear in the years which followed. But the Elizabethan Puritan movement, with its clearly defined agenda of organizational and liturgical changes which it was determined to effect in the established Church, finally came to an end. For the most part, its adherents found other, less militant ways of achieving reforms through the rest of James’s reign.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁸ Patrick Collinson, *The Religion of the Protestants: The Church in English Society 1559-1625* (Oxford, 1982), p. 282.

¹⁷⁹ W. B. Patterson, *James VI and I and the reunion of Christendom* (Cambridge, 1997), p. 48.

If James' goal was to find a way for Christians of different devotional persuasions to exist peacefully alongside one another in the same Church, the relative stability of the remainder of his reign says much about his success. The publication of the King James Bible was a vital part of this effort, and although the translation itself is often very beautiful, its success was largely due to its format, which was, in turn, related to religion, politics, and economics.

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