



In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture

By Alister McGrath

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This fascinating history of a literary and religious masterpiece explores the forces that obstructed and ultimately led to the decision to create an authorized translation, the method of translation and printing, and the central role the King James version of the Bible played in the development of modern English.

In the sixteenth century, to attempt to translate the Bible into a common tongue wasn't just difficult, it was dangerous. A Bible in English threatened the power of the monarch and the Church. Early translators like Tyndale, whose work greatly influenced the King James, were hunted down and executed, but the demand for English Bibles continued to grow. Indeed it was the popularity of the Geneva Bible, with its anti-royalist content, that eventually forced James I to sanction his own, pro-monarchy, translation. Errors in early editions--one declared that "thou shalt commit adultery"--and Puritan preferences for the Geneva Bible initially hampered acceptance of the King James, but it went on to become the definitive English-language Bible. McGrath's history of the King James Bible's creation and influence is a worthy tribute to a great work and a joy to read.

From the Trade Paperback edition.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In the Beginning is Alister McGrath's history of the King James Bible, and as the subtitle explains, his explanation of "How It Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture." McGrath's story begins with the development of the printing press, describes the forces (before, during, and after the Reformation) fueling the demand for English vernacular translations of the Bible, and considers the impact of the King James Version on Western worship and politics. McGrath deftly blends an arch and charming, donnish argot with breezy, tough, brass-tacks directness. Of the ongoing process of creating new biblical translations, he writes, "It has yet to end; indeed, it will not end, until either history is brought to a close or English ceases to be a living language." Elsewhere, describing the cultural influence of the Authorized Version, he explains, "Without the King James Bible, there would have been no *Paradise Lost*, no *Pilgrim's Progress*, no Handel's *Messiah*, no Negro spirituals, and no Gettysburg address.") A professor of historical theology at the University of Oxford, McGrath has written a number of popular books about Christianity (including *Theology for Amateurs*). *In The Beginning* continues his work of making complex matters of theological thought and history accessible to a wider audience. --Michael Joseph Gross

From Publishers Weekly

The peculiar history of the King James Bible highlights the power of marginal notations to destabilize a nation and command the anxious attention of a monarch. McGrath, professor of historical theology at Oxford University, recounts the production of this translation, the forces that allowed for its genesis and its influence on modern English, the history of England and the faith of millions since its 1604 publication. Although his "great men" emphasis on "doing" history offers few new insights and is embedded in a narrative that scans in overly broad strokes the intriguing circumstances of the Bible's production, this remains an engaging chronicle. McGrath frames the context for the KJV in phenomena such as the English church during and after Henry VIII's reign, the incendiary creativity of the translation process, the explosive force for change unleashed by the technological breakthrough of the printing press and the rise of nationalism. McGrath also situates the KJV as more immediately provoked by the English-language Geneva Bible, produced by self-exiled "radical" English Protestants in that republican city, during the reign of the Catholic Mary Tudor. As McGrath explains, prefaces to each book of Scripture and extensive interpretive notes offered in "plain English" account largely for the popularity the Bible enjoyed among laypersons hungry to read the word of God. This is a tale ripe for the telling; one wishes the execution were more satisfying. (Apr.)

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From Library Journal

Many today tend to take the Bible for granted and fail to recognize its permanent influence upon politics, literature, and law. During the 16th and 17th centuries, however, the availability of the scriptures in the vernacular inspired a revolution of free thought culminating in concepts of constitutional government and democracy whose impact upon the world continues to the present day. The far-reaching implications of the printing press, the rise of English as a national language, and the Reformation all closely bound to the history of the vernacular Bible figure prominently in the narrative of both of these new histories of the King James Bible...*In the Beginning* primarily focuses upon the translation of the King James Bible and is richly illustrated. Each work supplies a chronology and a comparison of major English translations of the most well known passages...Both books are a pleasure to read. Highly recommended for academic and public libraries.

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