



THE LAMP



"Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path." (Psalm 119)

A SPEAKING TOUR BY IAN ROBINSON



Ian Robinson, now retired, was Senior Lecturer at the University of Wales, Swansea, where he taught English Literature. He founded the Brynmill Press, and is author of such titles as "Cranmer's Sentences", "Holding the Centre", "The New Grammarian's Funeral", "Prayers for the New Babel", "The Survival of English", "Who Killed the Bible", and "The Possibility of the Tragic English Novel". He is active in the English Prayer Book Society.

Tour itinerary:

Sunday, October 30:

*Preaching at the 10:30 AM service at
St. George's Church, 134 Emerson Rd., Hamilton*

Followed by three talks on

"The Authorized Version and the Idea of an English Bible":

Monday, October 31:

*7:00 PM at Redeemer College, 777 Garner Rd. E., Ancaster
(Contact: Brian Munro, 519-756-3053)*

Tuesday, November 1:

*3:00 PM at Trinity College, 6 Hoskin Ave., Toronto
(Contact: Diana Versegny, 416-739-4422)*

Saturday, November 5:

*2:00 PM at St. Barnabas's Church, 70 James St., Ottawa
(Contact: Ron Bentley, 613-822-1911)*

(Following this portion of the tour under PBSC auspices, Prof. Robinson will be giving lectures on the blank verse of Shakespeare, one at Laurentian University in Sudbury, two at Algoma University in Sault Ste. Marie.

Dates and times to be determined.

For further information, please contact the universities:

www.laurentian.ca

www.algomau.ca)

WHY THE KING JAMES BIBLE ENDURES

(This article, by Charles McGrath, appeared in the New York Times on April 23, 2011.)

The King James Bible, which was first published 400 years ago next month, may be the single best thing ever accomplished by a committee. The Bible was the work of 54 scholars and clergymen who met over seven years in six nine-man subcommittees, called “companies”. In a preface to the new Bible, Miles Smith, one of the translators and a man so impatient that he once walked out of a boring sermon and went to the pub, wrote that anything new inevitably “endured many a storm of gainsaying, or opposition”. So there must have been disputes — shouting; table pounding; high-ruffed, black-gowned clergymen folding their arms and stomping out of the room — but there is no record of them. And the finished text shows none of the PowerPoint insipidness we associate with committee-speak or with later group translations like the 1961 New English Bible, which T.S. Eliot said did not even rise to “dignified mediocrity”. Far from bland, the King James Bible is one of the great masterpieces of English prose.

The issue of how, or even whether, to translate sacred texts was a fraught one in those days, often with political as well as religious overtones, and it still is. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, recently decided to retranslate the missal used at Mass to make it more formal and less conversational. Critics have complained that the new text is awkward and archaic, while its defenders (some of whom probably still prefer the Mass in Latin) insist that’s just the point — that language a little out of the ordinary is more devotional and inspiring. No one would ever say that the King James Bible is an easy read. And yet its very oddness is part of its power.

From the start, the King James Bible was intended to be not a literary creation but rather a political and theological compromise between the established church and the growing Puritan movement. What the king cared about was clarity, simplicity, doctrinal orthodoxy. The translators worked hard on that, going back to the original Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic, and yet they also spent a lot of time tweaking the English text in the interest of euphony and musicality. Time and again the language seems to slip almost unconsciously into iambic pentameter — this was the age of Shakespeare, commentators are always reminding us — and right from the beginning the translators embraced the

principles of repetition and the dramatic pause: “In the beginning God created the Heauen, and the Earth. And the earth was without forme, and voyd, and darkenesse was vpon the face of the deepe: and the Spirit of God mooued vpon the face of the waters”.

The influence of the King James Bible is so great that the list of idioms from it that have slipped into everyday speech, taking such deep root that we use them all the time without any awareness of their biblical origin, is practically endless: sour grapes; fatted calf; salt of the earth; drop in a bucket; skin of one’s teeth; apple of one’s eye; girded loins; feet of clay; whited sepulchers; filthy lucre; pearls before swine; fly in the ointment; fight the good fight; eat, drink and be merry.

But what we also love about this Bible is its strangeness — its weird punctuation, odd pronouns (as in “Our Father, which art in heaven”), all those verbs that end in “eth”: “In the morning it flourisheth, and groweth vp; in the euening it is cut downe, and withereth.” As Robert Alter has demonstrated in his startling and revealing translations of the Psalms and the Pentateuch, the Hebrew Bible is even stranger, and in ways that the King James translators may not have entirely comprehended, and yet their text performs the great trick of being at once recognizably English and also a little bit foreign. You can hear its distinctive cadences in the speeches of Lincoln, the poetry of Whitman, the novels of Cormac McCarthy.

Even in its time, the King James Bible was deliberately archaic in grammar and phraseology: an expression like “yea, verily”, for example, had gone out of fashion some 50 years before. The translators didn’t want their Bible to sound contemporary, because they knew that contemporaneity quickly goes out of fashion. In his very useful guide, “God’s Secretaries: The Making of the King James Bible”, Adam Nicolson points out that when the Victorians came to revise the King James Bible in 1885, they embraced this principle wholeheartedly, and like those people who whack and scratch old furniture to make it look even more ancient, they threw in a lot of extra Jacobeanisms, like “howbeit”, “peradventure”, “holden” and “behooved”.

This is the opposite, of course, of the procedure followed by most new translations, starting with Good News for Modern Man, a paperback Bible published by the American Bible Society in 1966, whose goal was to

reflect not the language of the Bible but its ideas, rendering them into current terms, so that Ezekiel 23:20, for example (“For she doted vpon their paramours, whose flesh is as the flesh of asses, and whose issue is like the issue of horses”) becomes “She was filled with lust for oversexed men who had all the lustfulness of donkeys or stallions”.

There are countless new Bibles available now, many of them specialized: a Bible for couples, for gays and lesbians, for recovering addicts, for surfers, for skaters and skateboarders, not to mention a superheroes Bible for children. They are all “accessible”, but most are a little tone-deaf, lacking in grandeur and majesty, replacing “through a glasse, darkly”, for instance, with something along the lines of “like a dim image in a mirror”. But what this modernizing ignores is that the most powerful religious language is often a little

elevated and incantatory, even ambiguous or just plain hard to understand. The new Catholic missal, for instance, does not seem to fear the forbidding phrase, replacing the statement that Jesus is “one in being with the Father” with the more complicated idea that he is “consubstantial with the Father”.

Not everyone prefers a God who talks like a pal or a guidance counselor. Even some of us who are nonbelievers want a God who speaketh like — well, God. The great achievement of the King James translators is to have arrived at a language that is both ordinary and heightened, that rings in the ear and lingers in the mind. And that all 54 of them were able to agree on every phrase, every comma, without sounding as gassy and evasive as the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission, is little short of amazing, in itself proof of something like divine inspiration.

CRANMER CONFERENCE 2011 LONDON, ONTARIO



This year's participants at the close of the Conference, outside St. George's Church

ST. MICHAEL'S YOUTH CONFERENCE



Conference participants at the end of the week, grouped on the ever-popular trampoline!

2012 CANADIAN CHURCH CALENDARS AVAILABLE

St. Peter Publications in Charlottetown have as usual produced one of their handsome wall calendars for 2012, containing the Sundays, saints' days, holy days and seasons of the church year in accordance with the BCP. The calendars are illustrated with reproductions of attractive original watercolour paintings of Anglican churches throughout Canada. They are printed on heavy, high-quality paper and the square for each day provides plenty of room for making notes. They can be ordered from St. Peter Publications, P.O. Box 713, Charlottetown, PEI, C1A 7L3 (phone 902-368-8442; e-mail office@stpeter.org). The price for single calendars is \$6.50 plus shipping and handling; for 25 calendars or more, \$5.80 each plus shipping and handling.

ONTARIO REGIONAL CYCLE OF PRAYER, OCTOBER-DECEMBER

(Over the coming months, please remember the following parishes in your prayers. You might consider using for this purpose one of Prayer #8 or #9, found on pages 43 and 44 of the Book of Common Prayer, or the prayer "For the Parish" found on page 736.)

OCT.	2	<i>Trinity XV</i>	St. John's in the Wilderness, Sarnia
	9	<i>Trinity XVI</i>	St. Matthias' Church, Toronto
	16	<i>Trinity XVII</i>	St. Paul's-on-the-Hill, Pickering
	23	<i>Trinity XVIII</i>	St. George's Memorial Church, Oshawa
	30	<i>Trinity XIX</i>	Christ Church, Bobcaygeon
NOV.	6	<i>Trinity XX</i>	St. Alban's Church, Delhi
	13	<i>Trinity XXI</i>	St. Anne's Church, Toronto
	20	<i>Next before Advent</i>	Christ Church, Brampton
	27	<i>Advent I</i>	St. Bride's Church, Mississauga
DEC.	4	<i>Advent II</i>	St. John's Church, Cambridge
	11	<i>Advent III</i>	Grace Church-on-the-Hill, Toronto
	18	<i>Advent IV</i>	St. James' Church, Fairmount
	25	<i>Christmas Day</i>	PBSC members without parishes

The Prayer Book Society of Canada was founded in 1986 by Anglicans who were alarmed at the erosion of classical Anglican doctrine, worship and spirituality that was proceeding alongside the adoption of new liturgies. The Society's aim is briefly to support the continuing use of the Prayer Book for all who value it as their preferred medium of worship, preserving as it does faithfulness to Holy Scripture and adherence to the orthodox Anglican doctrine of the Christian faith. The Mission Statement of the Society, adopted in 1995, is: "To promote the understanding and use of the Book of Common Prayer as a scriptural system of nurture for life in Christ".

The Society operates on two levels: the national level and the branch level. The National Council is responsible for setting policy and direction for the Society, and for overseeing activities with a national scope. All branch presidents are *ex officio* members of the National Council. The branches are individually responsible for organizing local activities and initiatives in their own geographical areas, in support of the aims and objectives of the Society.

The Ontario Council of PBSC Branches is an informal coalition of branches in southern Ontario, formed in 1994. It serves as a forum for the planning of joint activities, and provides a network of support for the branches. It publishes this newsmagazine, "**The Lamp**", which appears quarterly in the months of March, June, September and December. Opinions expressed in these pages are not necessarily those of the Society as a whole. Contributions of articles and news items are welcome, and should be sent to the editor (see opposite).

Branch contacts within our region:

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