

King James Onlyism

Is the KJV the Best Bible Version?

Mark W. Swarbrick

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This book is dedicated...

To all those who have been browbeaten by a cultist who said you were not saved because your Bible version was not the only correct one in the entire world. May this book give you peace and help you hold your own against the insanity that is KJV Onlyism.

Special thanks to...

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Previous publications by Mark Swarbrick...

Theistic Evolution: Did God Create Through Evolution?

Heavenly Miracles: True Stories of Supernatural Intervention

To Mormons with Love: A Pilgrimage Through Mormon History and Doctrine

1

Encounters of the Kooky Kind

I will never forget my first encounter with a King James Onlyist. I was senior pastor of a small rural church. One day a young man of our congregation came to me. He was quite agitated.

“Pastor, you have got to hear what the teacher of the senior adult Sunday School class is teaching everybody in his class!”

“Why? What sort of things is he saying?”

“He says that my version of the Bible is a devil’s bible. And that it is wrong to say Holy Spirit. We have to use the right name, Holy Ghost.”

“Seriously? He said that?”

“Oh yeah, and that’s not all. He’s saying all kinds of crazy stuff.”

“This is incredible. I preach every Sunday from the New American Standard Bible. Everyone knows that. He is telling everyone that their pastor is using a devil’s bible? I have never heard him say things like that.”

“He might not say it to your face, but he sure enough is saying it behind your back.”

“Well, I’m teaching the young adult class while his is going on. Listen, you run the sound system in the auditorium where his class is. Just hit record on the tape machine next Sunday morning before Sunday School starts. That way I can listen to it later.”

“Okay, will do!”

When I heard the tape the following week, I was shocked. Indeed, the teacher was telling people that you must use the King James Version, that it alone was the Word of God; any other version was of the devil. He claimed that the 1611 Authorized King James Version was the only Bible authorized by God. Furthermore, he was saying that Christians who use a wicked modern version would have no power in their life, because their fake bible doesn't use the proper name for the Holy Ghost.

I was incredulous. The man who taught this class was a very likable meek fellow. I would never have suspected that he would deliberately undermine the pastor of a church like that. What to do? This man had taught this class for years, long before I came on the scene. Everyone loved him. How many people believed in his teaching? I was about to find out the hard way.

I spoke with the teacher privately. I told him how much his work and ministry in the church was appreciated, but there was just one matter that needed to be cleared up. Then I brought up the matter of his teaching on the King James Version. He admitted he was teaching this, and he gave a little spiel about how that was God's own truth; the King James Version was the only Word of God.

I explained that, although I believed his position was in error, he was free to believe that if he wished. I said to him, "You can keep on teaching the class. You can keep on believing that. If people speak to you privately and want to know what you believe, you can share your viewpoint. I have no problem with that. But what you cannot do is teach that in Sunday School class."

"Well," he replied, "I know my teaching is the truth and I must obey God rather than man."

I carefully explained that half the church used a modern version, and his teaching would bring confusion and division. "Brother," I said, "You know as well as I do that

the scripture adjures us to avoid dissension and division in the church. You know that the Bible solemnly warns against being factious.”

I made my best effort to reason with him. I pleaded with him to teach the things that would bring people closer to Jesus and avoid controversial opinions that would cause division. I tried all I knew to salvage the situation but I was not successful. He insisted that he would continue to teach this to his class. I had to tell him, if that was the case, he could no longer teach the class. He took out his church membership card, threw it on the table and stomped out, never to return.

That week he went to all his friends in the church and told them the new preacher had run him off. Next Sunday, half the church was missing. The cult of King James Onlyism had split our church.

2

Biblical Background

What is KJV Onlyism?

While some merely believe that the King James Version of the Bible is the best translation ever made, there are others, such as the man who split our church, who fanatically believe that the KJV is the only accurate version in any language and that any other translation is of the devil.

They say all modern versions are produced by a conspiracy of depraved people working in concert to overthrow the Gospel. They say that anyone that doesn't think like them on this matter have been "deceived by the Alexandrian Cult." Those of this persuasion are called King James Only people. The movement is referred to as KJV Onlyism and many of its adherents have proven to be quite divisive, hostile and argumentative, causing church splits in countless churches across the nation.

Why Translations?

We need translations because we don't speak the languages that the Bible was originally written in. The Bible was written mainly in Hebrew and Greek. Daniel and Ezra were written in the ancient language of Biblical Aramaic. The Old Testament was mostly in Hebrew, and the New Testament was written in Greek. However, the Hebrew and Greek used were not the modern versions of these languages. The Old Testament was written in an archaic form of the Hebrew language known as Classical Hebrew. The New

Testament was written in an ancient dialect known as Koine Greek, which was the common street language of the people at the time.

What is Inerrancy?

The belief that the Bible is infallible and inerrant means that it has no errors when it speaks on any subject, regardless of whether the context is historical or spiritual. Typically, churches that hold to inerrancy do not maintain that any translation is inerrant, only that the original autographs written by the prophets or apostles are without error. However, KJV Onlyists believe that the King James Version itself is an infallible and inerrant translation of the Bible.

None of the original autographs exist, but we do have excellent copies of them. Indeed, there is more documentary evidence for the New Testament than any other writing of antiquity, there being over 5,800 complete or fragmented Greek manuscripts, 10,000 Latin manuscripts and 9,300 manuscripts in various other ancient languages, such as Syriac, Slavic, Gothic, Ethiopic, Coptic and Armenian.

There are slight variations between all of the manuscripts but we have so many that by making comparisons, scholars can determine with high accuracy what the exact original wording was. Even so, none of the variations would change one single doctrine held by the Church. Some of these manuscripts we have today are very old. Typically, the earlier the better as they have been copied fewer times and thus are prone to less error in the text.

As I have said, churches don't hold that any Bible version is inerrant, but only the original autographs. The exception to this, as I have said, is the KJV Onlyist camp. They believe that the King James Version translation is infallible and inerrant and that it is the only infallible

translation in the entire world. In this respect, they disagree with every Christian church on earth.

Such a position is wholly untenable, which is apparent by just asking a few questions: Where was the inerrant Word of God before the KJV was made? God said his word would not pass away, so where was it before 1611? Why would God only allow an infallible Bible in English but not in any of the other 7,353 languages of the world? Does God only care about English speaking people? Why would God choose English to be his choice for an infallible Bible? Why not Hebrew or Greek? Why not Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke?

Let me make this point clear at the outset: The King James Version is fine for those who wish to use it. Nothing I say herein should be misconstrued such that anyone should think that I am disparaging anyone who wants to use that version. What I am challenging in this writing is the position some take, which purports that the KJV is a perfect translation and that everyone must use it because it alone is the true Word of God.

3

The Problem of Archaic Language

What is wrong with the KJV? Quite a lot, actually. First of all, the King James Version of the Bible is written in an archaic language that is 400 years old. Many of the words used are no longer in common parlance. For example, is a reader likely to know what a *habergeon* is? Or a *sackbut*?

How about any of these words: *Chambering, cieled, cotes, suretiship, scall, brigandines, amerce, glede, wen, nitre, tabret, almug, neesing, chode, crookbackt, putenance, aceldama, balins, wot, trow, churl, ambassage, or wimples*. That is just a partial list of many of the words in the KJV that have meanings unknown to most people today. I would bet most KJV Onlyists don't even know their meanings.

It is argued that one can just get a dictionary. They would have to make sure it is one that contains the archaic old English words. How many people are not going to bother to do that, and will just gloss over a passage whether they understand it or not? A lot of people will do just that. The Bible needs to be clear and understandable to the common man, not only to those who wish to make a hobby of studying ancient English.

On top of that is the fact that the readability of the KJV text is particularly challenging. The KJV is written at a 12th-grade level, while the reading level of the average American is at a 7th/8th grade level. Compounding the problem are the numerous awkward and ambiguous passages in the KJV, such as Luke 14:10:

“But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee.”

This passage has nothing to do with “rooms” or “worshipping” or steak. It has to do with not trying to take the seat of honor at a banquet. How much clearer is the NIV:

“But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests.”

There are many phrases used in the KJV that have no meaning today, such as “*clouted upon their feet*,” “*collops of fat*,” “*hole's mouth*,” “*naughty figs*,” and “*fetchd a compass*.” Try hazarding a guess at the meanings of those. If you thought “*fetchd a compass*” means to go and get a compass, you would be wrong. It means to take a circuitous route.

KJV Onlyists argue that the Holy Ghost will reveal the meaning of the words and phrases. I tell them this: Give it a try then. Go read all the passages where those words and phrases are used. Pray for God to reveal the meaning to you. Write down your “Holy Ghost” interpretation of those words. Then check your work. Go search out a dictionary that covers 400-year-old English definitions and a book that explains old Elizabethan phrases to find out what is meant. As you check your work, I can guarantee you are going to see that you did not get them all correct. You won't score 100 percent. Not even close.

Yes, God can work miracles and reveal things, but God expects us to use common sense and read the Bible in a language we are familiar with. Insisting that everyone read a Bible version written in an archaic language that they don't understand is unrealistic. Furthermore, expecting God to magically reveal word meanings to people is tantamount to

asking God to feed people manna from heaven when there is a grocery store down the street. As Jesus said, “*You shall not test the Lord, your God.*” (Matthew 4:7)

The bottom line is this: You may be fine reading the King James Version, but to force that on others is not realistic or wise. Many people are simply not going to bother reading something that isn't written in language they can follow. They will just give up on reading the Bible. Many people have told me, “*I tried to read the Bible before, but I just couldn't get into it. All those thee's and thou's and so forth, it was just too hard to read.*” Countless multitudes have given up on the Bible because they were not encouraged to try a modern version that was translated into current English.

Changed Meanings

Language is not a static thing. It is living, meaning that it is always changing. Many of the words used in the King James Version have changed since the time of its translation. Sometimes this has led to some false doctrines in the Church.

For example, In Genesis 1:28, the KJV has God telling Adam and Eve to “*Replenish the earth.*” Some have assumed that if God told them to replenish the earth, that must mean it was full before. This has led to the concoction of the Pre-Adamite race theory, wherein it is postulated that an entire race of humans existed and died before Adam was created. This is an unbiblical theory since the New Testament tells us clearly that Adam was the first man and that sin and death came into the world through Adam. You cannot, therefore, have a whole race of men living and dying before Adam, as there was no sin and death before Adam.

The fact of the matter is that the word *replenish* in 1611 meant *to fill*. It did not mean *refill*, as it does today. Answers in Genesis has an excellent article on this, and it can be

found here: <https://answersingenesis.org/bible-questions/what-does-replenish-the-earth-mean/>

Other examples: the KJV uses the word *prevent*, which then meant *precede*. The word *conversation* meant *behavior* or *character* in 1611, but today it refers to speaking. *Leasing* in 1611 did not mean to rent out. It meant *deceit*. In Matthew 6:6, Jesus says, “...when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray.” From this, we get the term “prayer closet.”

But Jesus never actually said to go into a closet and pray. The word used referred to an inner room, such as a bedroom. Jesus was speaking of going into our own bedroom or study or other private place to pray. The Hollman Christian Standard Bible accurately translates this passage as: “*But when you pray, go into your private room, shut your door, and pray...*” Many such examples could be given where the word meanings have changed since 1611.

Granted, in most cases, there is no serious error given by misunderstanding these words, but the point is this: The claim made by KJV Onlyists that the KJV is the most accurate version is simply not born out by the facts. The truth is that in many passages, the words used in the KJV are so archaic that they no longer mean what they meant in 1611; thus, they no longer convey what the writer of scripture was actually saying.

With archaic words that are no longer used, the reader can research the term and find out what it meant in 1611, but with words that are still in use but have changed meaning, the reader has no warning. For example, the reader won't know to look up the 17th century meaning of *prevent* or *conversation* because those words are still in common use. He will have no way of knowing which words have changed in their meaning.

4

Literal Versus Dynamic Translation

There are two types of translation. There is a literal word-for-word translation. This type attempts to use one English word for every word of the original language. At first thought, this would seem to be the most accurate method. That is not always the case, as we shall see.

The second type of translation is called a dynamic translation or a thought-for-thought translation. This type endeavors to bring out the full meaning of a passage as it was intended by the writer of scripture, even if it takes more words than were in the original autograph. One approach should not be considered to be necessarily better than the other. They both have their value. Referencing both is the best approach.

We shall now delve into some of the practical matters to be considered when translating scripture. We will look now at which type of translation the King James is and what failings it has.

Colloquialisms and Idioms

Idioms, or sayings, are something translators have to deal with. Those who learn a new language quickly find out that understanding foreign words and grammar is not enough. It is very necessary to learn the idioms used in that language as well. For example, My wife is from Asia. English is her second language. Very often she will use an idiom that

makes no sense at all to me. That is because I don't know the idioms and colloquialisms of Tagalog. Sometimes I speak to her with an American idiom without even realizing it, one that she has never heard before. Once I told her, "It's raining cats and dogs!" She looked at me as if I had lost my mind.

The Bible is full of idioms, or sayings, that people 2,000 or 4,000 years ago understood, but today no one understands them except scholars of the biblical languages. The KJV translators could have done much better at translating many of these idioms.

KJV Onlyists claim that the KJV is a literal word-for-word translation, and as such, it is the most accurate type of translation. This assertion is false on two counts: First of all, the KJV is not completely a word-for-word translation. There are many places where idioms are used by the ancient writer of scripture, but those idioms are not clear today, so the translators of the KJV replaced the idiom with completely different words, a phrase of current vernacular. But in other places, the KJV translators left a Hebrew idiom as is, even though it had no readily discerned meaning in English.

Here are some examples: In the Old Testament, the original Hebrew speaks of God "*enlarging his nostrils.*" That was a common idiom in Moses' day, and readers then understood that it meant to get angry. The King James Version does not translate that idiom literally from the Hebrew. It simply says God got angry, which is a helpful translation. This passage was not translated word-for-word in order to make the meaning clear to the reader.

In Exodus 34:6 the Hebrew says literally that God is "*long of nose.*" The KJV translation committee did not render this word for word either because no one today would understand this ancient Hebrew idiom, which meant "slow to anger." The KJV translated it as "longsuffering." That was a good choice. Even though it was not a literal word-for-word translation, it made better sense for an English reader. So the

claim that the KJV is a pure word-for-word literal translation is not exactly true.

However, in some cases the KJV translators kept a word-for-word translation, even when they should not have. Proverbs 23:6 says in the KJV, *“Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye...”* The Hebrew idiom “evil eye” is not understood by English speaking people. As a result, an entire superstition has grown up around this verse. When I was in Turkey, I noticed there was an odd blue eye design painted on the back of all the buses and on many buildings. I asked our guide what that symbol meant. She said it was a talisman that has the magical power of preventing someone who is cursed with an evil eye from casting a spell on you. In many foreign lands they take the “evil eye” very seriously! And it all started with the KJV.

The phrase *“an evil eye”* was nothing more than a Hebrew saying that was used to indicate that someone was stingy. A modern translation does not translate this idiom word-for-word, but translates it as, *“Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy...”*

The point is, even the KJV translators understood that sometimes it is better to give a thought-for-thought translation than a word-for-word translation, yet the KJV is not consistent and sometimes does not have a thought-for-thought translation of an idiom, even when they should.

1 Samuel 24:3 is an example of this. It reads: *“And he came to the sheepecotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet...”* The modern reader may very well assume that Saul went into the cave to put his sandals on, or to wrap bandages on his sore feet. A translator familiar with the ancient languages would understand that *“cover his feet”* was a euphemism of the time that meant something entirely different. The NIV correctly translates the meaning of the Hebrew idiom to an idiom that makes sense today: *“He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave*

was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself.” The point is, word-for-word is not always the best translation.

Idioms aside, it should also be understood that a word in one language cannot always be translated into only one word in another language. The Hebrew and Greek languages are very rich languages, meaning they have some words that pack a lot of meaning into them. It may take two or more English words to pull the full meaning out of what was contained in that single word of the original language.

Conversely, Greek has in some cases, several words for which we have only one. Koine Greek has three words for love: *Agape*, *phileo*, and *eros*, which refer, respectively, to obedient love to God, brotherly affection and lastly, passionate love. It may for example, be more accurate to translate *phileo* with the two words “brotherly affection” rather than one word, “love.” If you force a word-for-word translation you end up losing the full meaning of the scripture. This is where translations such as the NIV and NLT¹ excel at bringing out the full meaning of a passage.

¹ *The NLT, along with the LB are not translations per se, but are paraphrases. They are excellent for personal edification and devotions, but are not the best for doctrinal in-depth study. For that a translation that tends more toward word-for-word literalness is best.*

5

Improved Scholarship

Classical Hebrew and Koine Greek are dead languages. They are no longer used conversationally. Knowing modern Hebrew and Greek doesn't make you an expert in these biblical languages. These ancient languages are different. They have differing grammar, syntax, idioms and word definitions from their modern counterpart. One needs to devote oneself to studying the ancient dialects in order to properly understand them. The level of scholarship in these languages is much advanced today compared to what was known in the 17th century when the KJV was made.

In the last hundred years a revolution has taken place in the field of biblical linguistic studies, resulting in an increased understanding of biblical texts in their original languages. There have been great advances in our understanding of everything from Hebrew orthography to Greek syntax to Aramaic word order.

The discovery of many ancient Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, especially after 1931, provided scholars with important new sources to study. An enormous number of Greek papyri have been unearthed in Egypt, containing official reports, private letters, petitions, business accounts and various other records of the activities of the first centuries.

All of this gave us study material which greatly enhanced our understanding of the vocabulary and idioms of the original languages. These discoveries, and their study by

linguistic scholars, have tremendously increased our understanding of the biblical languages.

Those involved in the translation of the KJV did not even know what language they were translating from. They thought that the Greek texts were written in Classical Greek. They were mistaken. The New Testament was written in an entirely different language, Koine Greek, a language that had been dead for a thousand years in 1611. Their error was not discovered until the 19th century.

This resulted in some mistranslations in the KJV. For example, in Classical Greek the word *miseo* means to hate, and since the translators thought that they were working with Classical Greek, that is how they translated it in Luke 14:26, where Jesus says: “*If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*”

The problem is that is not exactly what Jesus said. Although *miseo* means hate in Classical Greek, it means something different in Koine Greek. In that language it means to “prefer less.” Jesus was not telling his followers to hate their mothers and fathers. He was telling them that their devotion to him must exceed their love of family.

Although most Christians are not adversely affected by this mistranslation, there are some who have been, and have used their religion abrasively, with cold disregard to family members needlessly, and they have used this verse to justify it. Even cults use that verse to separate people from their families and bring them into isolation.

The mistranslations of the KJV have given ammunition to those who would deride the Bible by saying it contains contradictions. Here is an example: Acts 9:7 in the KJV tells us that those travelling with Paul on the road to Damascus “*heard the voice*” of Jesus. But Acts 22:9 in the KJV says that they “*heard not the voice.*” This is a clear contradiction.

Mormon missionaries often refer to these two in the KJV to try to prove to people that the Bible cannot be trusted, and thus (they say) the Book of Mormon is needed.

This problem is cleared up when one understands that Acts 22:9 in the KJV is mistranslated. The Koine Greek actually says that they “*did not understand the voice.*” So Acts 9:7 says they heard the voice and Acts 22:9 elaborates, explaining that although they heard the sound of the voice they could not understand what was being said. This is one of many cases where the KJV translation committee erred because no one then knew the New Testament was written in Koine Greek, not Classical Greek.

Here is another example of poor translation: In the KJV version of Exodus 22:18 we read: “*Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.*” Again, that is not what the original text actually said. The KJV committee mistranslated the Hebrew word *mekhashepha* as witch. The word actually means poisoner. The wicked King James used this translation to justify torturing and murdering people he said were witches. King James personally interrogated an alleged witch, a lady named Agnes Sampson. While she was being brutally tortured, Agnes' head was shaved and her head was wrenched with a rope while the King looked on with “great delight.” Many have used the King James Bible translation of Exodus 22:18 as a religious justification for hunting and executing witches. As many as 100,000 people were executed as witches in the 16th and 17th centuries, due in no small part to the mistranslation of this one passage in the KJV.

Today linguistic scholars see shades of meaning and nuanced inflections of expression in the original languages of scripture which eluded the KJV translators. Need the point even be said? It is obvious. With the increased scholarship in the area of ancient biblical languages, we are supremely more capable today of making an accurate translation of the ancient biblical manuscripts than we were 400 years ago.

6

Additional Manuscript Evidence

As has been said, we now have over 5,800 Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. How many did the translators of the KJV have? For the translation of the New Testament, the KJV translation committee relied primarily upon the work of one man, Desiderius Erasmus. The New Testament of the 1611 KJV is based primarily on the Greek New Testament text compiled by Erasmus in 1516. Erasmus used just a handful of late Greek manuscripts when composing his text, the oldest of which only dated back to the 12th century.²

Consider this. The only manuscripts Erasmus had available were documents that had been hand-copied repeatedly for a thousand years or more, and he only had a few of them. Today we have discovered many manuscripts that are much older and better. Dr. Kenneth Boa, Ph.D., President of Reflections Ministries explains what the situation is today:

"The time span of the New Testament manuscripts is exceptional...The John Rylands Fragment (P52) of the Gospel of John is dated at A.D. 117-38, only a few decades after the Gospel was written. The Bodmer Papyri are dated from A.D. 175-225, and the Chester Beatty Papyri date from about A.D. 250. The time span for most of the New Testament is less than 200 years (and some are within 100

² Erasmus originally assembled his Greek text based on 7 Greek manuscripts and published it in 1516

years) from the date of authorship to the date of our earliest manuscripts."

The KJV translators had to work with hand-written copies that were made over a thousand years after the original autograph was written. Now compare that to what the translators of modern versions have had to work with. They had access to very ancient manuscripts that were written less than two hundred years from the time of the original, or in some cases only a few decades from the original. Obviously, the closer in time a manuscript is from the original, the more accurate it is likely to be, for it has been copied fewer times.

We don't have just a dozen or so manuscripts as Erasmus had. We have over 5,000 of them. Today our much larger pool of manuscripts allows us to get a much more accurate text to translate from.

Traditional Stasis

People frequently are uncomfortable with change. This fact seems to permeate every facet of Christendom. This is not always a good thing. I remember when I pastored a small church that launched a bus ministry to reach unchurched children with the love of Jesus.

We bought an old school bus, painted it and drove slowly through neighborhoods playing Christian children's music on a loudspeaker, while workers walked along each side of the street knocking on doors, asking if there were any children we could pick up and bring to our Children's Church on the next Sunday.

On the first week we launched this ministry we saw 16 children, who had never been to church, give their hearts to Jesus. Those were exciting times. But in spite of the success there were a number of people who complained that "we had never done things this way before."

Some wanted the church to remain a little private club of their familiar friends. As new young families began attending, I heard suspicious comments: “We don’t know anything about these new people!” Some people even quit the church over it. Changing *anything* in Christendom can bring a severe backlash.

Because of this fact there is sometimes an impervious wall of tradition that keeps things from moving forward with fresh direction from the Holy Spirit. This is especially true when people get the mistaken idea that you are tampering with the Word of God.

The KJV translation committee was well aware of this resistance to change. They had a strong desire not to engender criticism by anything being too different than what people were accustomed to, *regardless of what the Greek manuscripts said*. The committee paid close attention to the Latin Vulgate and previous English versions. After all, as they said in the 1611 preface, they were not writing a new translation, rather they intended “*to make a good one better.*”

KJV Onlyists are oblivious to the fact that the KJV was not a new translation, it was a revision.³ As such, the translators were careful not to change too much. Incidentally, the 1611 preface destroys the position of KJV Onlyists, for the translators themselves did not claim to be writing a new translation and neither did they claim infallibility. They even admitted new Bible versions in the future would be required to correct their errors. See the footnote for a link to the preface.⁴

In the 1611 preface the translators do not deride other English versions as KJV Onlyists do. On the contrary they emphatically approved of other existing versions, calling them the word of God. They said that, concerning previous translators, the KJV committee should not be considered to be “condemning any of their labors.” They also stated clearly

³ *The KJV was a revision of the Bishop’s Bible.*

⁴ <http://www.togetherweteach.com/TCB/kjvpreface.htm>

that they considered their translation (the KJV) contained “imperfections and blemishes.” What a humble and sensible attitude the KJV translation committee had. How different their modest perspective from the haughty animosity displayed by KJV Onlyists as they spew forth their self-righteous vitriol against “heretics” who prefer a modern version.

I have said all that to say this: Because of what I call *traditional stasis*, there are places where the KJV has no manuscript support whatsoever for some of its renderings. Let me say that again. In several dozen passages there is no Greek text that corresponds to the English of the KJV.

Where did the text of those passages come from? They came from the Latin Vulgate. The Vulgate is a 4th century translation of the Bible from Greek to Latin that became the Catholic Church's official version. The KJV was made in the 17th century at a time when the Latin Vulgate had already been standing as “The Bible” for a thousand years. Ecclesiastical powers and lovers of tradition did not want to see its readings changed. In at least 60 places, the KJV translators abandoned all then-existing printed editions of the Greek New Testament, choosing instead to follow precisely the reading in the Latin Vulgate.

Additionally, Erasmus did not have a complete Greek text for the book of Revelation. For the last six verses of Revelation he had nothing at all. So for these verses, as well as in many other places, he translated from the Latin Vulgate into Greek. The KJV translators then used his Greek version to translate into English.

Years later, when Erasmus had access to more Greek manuscripts, he found that what he had translated from the Vulgate was in error. He then issued a new version of his Greek text with the corrections. However, the KJV translation committee used his uncorrected edition. Consequently, the errors found their way into the KJV. As is readily apparent, anyone who claims that the KJV was a

perfectly pure and fresh translation from the original languages is simply uninformed of the facts.

7

A History of Bible Translations

“Why do we have to have all these new Bible versions? The Authorized King James Version was good enough for the apostles, so it is good enough for me!”

People actually say this. It reveals their complete ignorance of how our Bible came to be. The Bible in the days of the disciples was the Old Testament. It was originally written in Hebrew, but by Jesus’ time many no longer understood that language. Greek was the common language of the people. So, the Old Testament Bible used in Jesus’ day, the one used in the synagogues and read and quoted by Jesus himself, was actually a “modern version.” It was called the Greek Septuagint. It was a translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek.

Some mistrusted this new version. They felt that the Word of God should only be in its original language. If Hebrew was good enough for the prophets it should be good enough for them, they claimed. Yet the fact remains: Jesus used the Septuagint and that is proof that God has nothing against modern versions.

As time went on, the apostles wrote letters to the churches and wrote the Gospel accounts. These were written in Koine Greek. They were passed around among the churches and many hand copies of them were made on papyrus or parchments.⁵ The great amount of copying

⁵*Papyrus: The stems of the Cyperus papyrus plant were sliced and flattened together to make a sort of writing paper. Parchment: Animal skins were specially treated and used as a writing surface.*

actually helped to preserve the purity of the text, for no one person or entity could corrupt the writings, either accidentally or on purpose, for each local church had multiple copies.

The teaching of the apostles was held to be completely authoritative, as the apostles were the ones commissioned by Jesus to further the Gospel and found the Church. Consequently, the apostolic writings were rightly considered to be holy scripture. These writings were eventually compiled and became what we call the New Testament.

Fast forward about 300 years. Now no one understands Greek anymore. Everyone is speaking Latin. So, the Bible was translated into Latin. It was called the Latin Vulgate. People often resist change and once again many objected to the need for a modern version. After all, they argued, Greek was the language of the apostles. It is sacrilege to change it, complained some.

Of course, the Latin version was eventually accepted and it became the Bible for well over a thousand years. Latin is a beautiful language and people came to think of it as God's language. This attitude was held long after no one could speak Latin anymore. In fact, the Catholic Church did not forgo holding services in Latin until 1967.

Part of the reason for the reformation led by Martin Luther in the 16th century was because no one understood Latin and the Catholic Church could get away with teaching whatever they pleased, as the people had no Bible in their language. Martin Luther fixed that. He translated the Bible into German, much to the displeasure of the ecclesiastical powers.

English Versions

John Wycliffe hand-wrote the first English version in the 14th century. He didn't have any manuscripts in the original

languages so he translated from the Latin Vulgate into English. Not ideal, but better than nothing. The Catholic pope was so infuriated by the Bible being released in English, that 44 years after Wycliffe died, the pope ordered Wycliffe's bones to be dug-up, crushed, and scattered in the river.

The war was on and the Catholic Church was busy torturing and murdering anyone who dared to make an English copy of the Bible. In 1525 William Tyndale became the first to make use of the recently invented printing press to make a printed English Bible. The King of England was hot on his trail to put an end to his work and his very life.

Tyndale was eventually captured by the King. He was imprisoned for 500 days before he was strangled and burned at the stake in 1536. Tyndale's last words were, "Oh Lord, open the King of England's eyes".

The Coverdale Bible came out in 1535. It was translated from Luther's German text and from the Latin. In 1549 came the Matthew-Tyndale Bible. Many of these early Bible translators were put to death for their work.

Finally, in 1539 came the first "authorized version." "Authorized," in the sense that the king of England would not burn you at the stake for making it. This was known as the Great Bible and its production was authorized by King Henry VIII.

The Geneva Bible was published by Protestants in 1560. This is the first Bible to have chapters and numbered verses. This was the Bible used by the Puritans and brought to America by the Pilgrims. It was the Bible of the Protestant Reformation. An interesting side note is that the margin notes of the Geneva Bible declared that the Pope was the Antichrist.

In 1568 the Church of England revised their Great Bible into what was called the Bishop's Bible. Most people,

especially Protestants, did not like this “modern version” and stuck with their Geneva Bible.

In 1589 the Catholic Church decided if you can't beat 'em, join 'em and went ahead with their own English version of the Bible, called the Doway/Rheims translation. Dr. William Fulke of Cambridge quickly published a refutation showing that the Catholic version was not faithful to the original documents and that it was deliberately corrupted in order to support Catholicism's private interpretations and doctrines.

Finally, in the 17th century the clergy of the Church of England asked the king if they could produce a revision of the Bishop's Bible. This revision became the Authorized 1611 King James Version of the Holy Bible.

The King James Bible was not readily accepted by the people. Many were Protestants and they didn't trust a Bible made by the Church of England, which was not a protestant church. The KJV translators had relied somewhat on the Catholic Doway/Rheims Bible, which made the KJV suspect to Protestants. The Geneva Bible was favored by the Protestants and it was preferred over the KJV, which they considered to be a new modern Catholic version, a product authorized by the sinful King James I of England.

A Perfect Bible?

A quick review: The claim of the KJV Onlyists is that the KJV produced in 1611 is a perfect version. They believe that God so superintended the translators that he miraculously kept them from making any error. Therefore, every Christian should be using a 1611 Authorized King James Version, according to the Onlyists.

The fact of the matter is, they themselves are not using the 1611 version. The KJV Onlyists are unwittingly using the 1769 revision of the KJV, which has approximately

100,000 changes from the actual 1611 King James Bible. Most of these changes are spelling changes, but there are also changes in wording, sentence structure, grammar and punctuation.

Additionally, the actual 1611 version contained the Apocrypha, as all Catholic Bibles do. Many of these 1769 Bibles still have the 1611 preface, which has the date of 1611, so they are unaware that they are actually reading a revision made in 1769. Furthermore, the 1769 version is not the first revision, but the fourth revision of the KJV. There were three prior revisions made in 1629, 1638, and 1762. Besides revisions there were releases of different editions. A new "edition" can be thought of as a very minor revision. New editions were released in the following years: 1613, 1616, 1617, 1618, 1629, 1630, 1633, 1634, 1637, 1638, 1640, 1642, 1653, 1659, 1675, 1679, 1833, 1896, and 1904.

All of this begs the question: If the KJV translators made no error, then why are KJV Onlyists using a revision made 158 years after the KJV was produced? When confronted with this, KJV Onlyists say that there were only errors in spelling and printing. Apparently, we are supposed to assume God was able to keep them from any linguistic and translation errors, but could not help them with their spelling and printing. That, of course, is a bridge too far.

Secondly, although most errors were of a spelling nature, there actually are a number of more serious errors that changed the words of scripture. KJV Onlyists maintain that the KJV translators made no error. If they made no error, then the presence of even one error in the text is an inexplicable problem for their position, and there were many.

Are we supposed to believe that God supernaturally kept them from error, but only most of the time, not always? The point is: If what the KJV Onlyists claim is true, then there should have never been a need for any new editions and no revisions whatsoever.

A Catholic Bible

The Onlyists make much of the fact that the KJV is called the “Authorized” version, as though some holy ecclesiastical authority, or perhaps God himself, has affixed a stamp of approval upon the KJV. Let us examine that more closely.

The Church of England, which is the entity that petitioned the king for permission to make another English Bible, was not a Protestant church. It was a Catholic Church. It differed in name for one reason only. In the 16th century King Henry the Eighth wanted to divorce his wife and marry his mistress and the pope would not let him. The king did so anyway and the pope excommunicated him. King Henry then declared in 1534 that he alone should be the final authority in matters relating to the English church. This ecclesiastical authority was passed down to subsequent kings.

King Henry declared that all Catholic churches in England were no longer subject to the Pope and they made up a new name for their church – the Church of England. But it was still to a great extent Roman Catholic in practice and doctrine, except for obedience to the Catholic pope.

In the 17th century King James was ruler over the Church of England. That is why the priests of the Church of England went to King James to request a new English version of the Bible. The king was effectively the pope of the Church of England, as well as the ruler of the land. To make a Bible version without his approval could get you burned at the stake.

And that is why the KJV is called the Authorized King James Version. Its name has nothing to do with godly approval. It very simply means that an ungodly king allowed his essentially Catholic church to make an English translation. The translation committee that produced the KJV was comprised of 47 priests from the Church of England. So we see, “authorized” confers no divine approval upon the

KJV. The KJV is the product of what was essentially a Catholic church. That is why the Puritans and the Pilgrims who came to America preferred the Geneva Bible. No doubt, there were some pompous Church of England clergy who smugly touted their new “authorized” version as more legitimate than the Protestant Geneva Bible.

The Holy Grail

KJV Onlyists complain that modern versions have changed this or that and omitted certain words or phrases and that they are thereby invoking God’s wrath for changing the Word of God. In a moment we will discuss some differences between the KJV and modern versions relative to specific verses, but first we must settle an important point.

We must establish what the ultimate authority is for determining how a passage of scripture should read. It should be clear to the reader that the final authority of what is or is not the Word of God is the original autographs of the Old Testament prophets and the New Testament apostles. What they wrote is the infallible and inerrant Word of God.

We do not have the originals, but the examination of the multitudinous array of ancient manuscripts we possess allows us to discern the original text. To determine the exact wording used by the apostle, scholars compare all the manuscripts but give more weight to some based on the manuscript's age, quality, location found, and type of print. A scholarly compendium of the oldest and most reliable of these constitutes the Holy Grail. It is to these manuscripts that constitute the final authority. It is to these that we look to determine if a text is faithful to the Word of God as written by God’s prophet or apostle.

The point I am driving at is that the King James Version is not the ultimate authority on what the Word of God is. KJV Onlyists will demonstrate that something in a modern version is different than what is in the KJV. They open up a

King James Version and say, “Look! This is what the Word of God really says and they changed it!”

If a passage reads differently from the KJV, or is different from what we are accustomed to reading, that in itself does not prove anything. The question is not, what does the KJV say; rather the question is, what did the apostle write?

Nothing New Under the Sun

When the Old Testament was translated from Hebrew to Greek, resulting in the Septuagint, many people objected to the modern version. When the New Testament was translated from Greek to Latin, again the modern version of the Latin Vulgate was considered an abomination. How dare anyone take the Bible out of the language of the apostles? A thousand years later English versions were considered a work of the devil. Didn't everyone know that Latin is the language of the Church? It is God's language, they argued. How dare anyone put the Word of God into a vulgar common language, they would say, not realizing the original Koine Greek of the New Testament was the common street language of the people. When the Geneva Bible became the standard, the Puritans and Pilgrims resented the new version (KJV) that was being made.

And guess what? Some folks still think a modern version is the work of Satan. Indeed there is nothing new under the sun. People have complained about modern versions ever since Jesus read from the Septuagint.

Today we have a number of modern versions: The New King James Version, a revision of the KJV, the English Standard Version, a revision of the Revised Standard Version, the New Living Translation, a revision of the Living Bible, the New International Version, and the New American Standard Version, a revision of the American Standard Version.

8

The Deity of Christ

The doctrine that Jesus is God, the second person of the Trinity, is a cardinal doctrine of Christianity. Anyone that has debated with a cultist from Mormonism or Jehovah's Witnesses knows this fundamental doctrine is often assailed by them.

Although you can establish the deity of Christ with a KJV, that version is somewhat weaker on this doctrine than modern versions. What the apostles actually wrote makes a much stronger argument for the deity of Christ than what is recorded in the KJV. Compare the following verses and see how much easier it is to make a case for the deity of Christ when the verses are more faithful to the original apostolic writing.

John 1:18 --

KJV - No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

NASB - No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

NIV - No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.

Romans 9:5 –

KJV - Whose *are* the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ *came*, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

NIV- Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen.

ESV - To them belong the patriarchs, and from their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever. Amen.

Titus 2:13 –

KJV -- Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ...

NASB -- looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus...

NIV - while we wait for the blessed hope--the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ...

2 Peter 1:1 –

KJV - to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ...

ESV - To those who have obtained a faith of equal standing with ours by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ...

NASB - To those having obtained a faith equally precious with ours, through the righteousness of our

God and Savior Jesus Christ...

As can be seen, the clarity of the modern versions absolutely nails it down that Jesus is God, whereas in the King James Version there is room for cultists to weasel out an alternative meaning from the passages. The KJV translators did not do this on purpose. The scholarship of Koine Greek syntax and grammar was simply insufficient in 1611 for them to get the most accurate rendering.

9

The Psychology of Cultism

I have found in my encounters with KJV Onlyists a particular elitist attitude. They don't just think they are right. They *know* they're right and will proselytize their "truth" with a rabid fanaticism. They have the truth, you don't, and woe unto anyone who disagrees with them. As is true with all dogmatic legalists, they love hearing themselves more than exhibiting the love and graciousness of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Just as the gentleman in my church was zealous to expound his opinions with utter disregard to what it would do to the church, so in many cases, many KJV Onlyists are eager for a fight. Therefore, it is instructive to remind ourselves what the Bible says about those who create factions in the Church.

1 Corinthians 1:10 - *I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you...*

Titus 3:10 - *Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them.*

2 Timothy 2:14 - *Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.*

Quarreling about words is exactly what the KJV Onlyist is engaging in. The fact that KJV Onlyists tend towards sectarian, elitist behavior and abrasive dogmatism is telling. We can conclude, along with James, "*This is not the wisdom*

that comes down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic.” (James 3:15)

The Allure of KJV Onlyism

Why are people attracted to this teaching? One reason has already been mentioned, man’s innate tendency to avoid change. Another reason is that the Onlyists have written a number of books loaded with false information and some people who read them are deceived by them. Some of these books contain outright lies, such as the book by Gail Riplinger, *New Age Bible Versions*. This book goes beyond bad scholarship. It is loaded with misrepresentations, out-and-out lies and false accusations. For an in-depth analysis of that book, see the link in the footnote.⁶

Many KJV Onlyists claim that no one can get saved through reading a modern version. It can rightly be said that this level of KJV Onlyism is a cult, for their statement is a denial of salvation by grace through faith. They are saying your salvation depends upon your reading the correct version. That is salvation by works.

I believe those attracted to the KJV Only cult are drawn by an imbalance in their spiritual walk. The same imbalance the Pharisees had. Jesus said to them:

“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.”
(John 5:39-40)

The Onlyists believe that life is found in having the King James Version. That is wrong. Eternal life is found only in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When one has a vital living relationship with Jesus, the person realizes that legalistic details are merely a distraction from the real thing.

⁶ <https://www.aomin.org/aoblog/1996/09/01/new-age-bible-versions-refuted/>

All cults appeal to a person's pride through an invitation to be part of the one group that knows it all and has everything figured out. Cults tend to be close-knit groups that foster friendships. Consequently, they often appeal to people that are lonely due to relationship issues. Within the cult they find acceptance. Others may have a tendency toward narcissistic megalomania; they have a need to be seen as authoritative and important. To fulfill that drive, these souls echo the dogmatic assertions of a cult that purports to be the exclusive repository of truth.

This explains why convincing an Onlyist of his error is next to impossible. A logical explanation is not what is needed or wanted. What is lacking is a relationship with Jesus that is so dynamic that a person is filled with love for others, and has living water flowing out of one's heart. When people have that, they don't care for the counterfeit religion of a cult.

10

Conclusion

The argument of the KJV Onlyist reflects a narrow mindset that thinks the Kingdom of God is centered on America. Of the 7,353 languages in the world, only 698 have a full translation of the Bible in their language. The Church must concentrate on remedying this and has no time to waste dealing with the distraction which is King James Onlyism.

The idea that God would decree that the only Word of God for the entire world must be in English is a cogitation of an uneducated sectarian mind. Flatly stated, KJV Onlyism is, albeit unconsciously, a racist concept at its core. Acts 10:34 in the KJV says “God is no respecter of persons.” The NASB says it this way: “God is not one to show partiality.” Since God does not show arbitrary favoritism, we can be sure he does not favor English speaking races over others.

Those who insist on everyone only using a KJV Bible tend to be fanatically unbalanced and uneducated on the history of the Holy Scriptures. Their lack of education in the area of historic Christianity makes them prey to distortions which lead to division and strife.

The KJV is not the only version and neither is it the best version. There are ten reasons why the KJV is not as good as a quality modern version.

1. The 400-year-old language it uses is difficult and hard to understand in many passages. It discourages people from reading the Bible.

2. The meanings of many of the archaic words are unknown to most people.
3. Many of the word meanings have changed since 1611, resulting in numerous passages conveying a meaning that was not intended by the biblical author.
4. The KJV translations of Hebrew idioms into English is not the best.
5. The scholarship of the original languages is far advanced today compared to the situation in 1611, resulting in modern versions having a more accurate rendering of some passages.
6. Recent discoveries of very old manuscripts, fragments and early translations have given scholars much more material at their disposal which they can use to determine the most likely exact reading of a passage.
7. The KJV was influenced by the force of tradition to follow the Bishop's Bible of the Church of England and the Catholic Latin Vulgate, rather than what the apostles wrote.
8. Due to the inferior linguistic scholarship of the 17th century, a number of passages in the KJV do not support the deity of Christ as clearly as the actual autographs did. Modern versions correct this error.
9. KJV Onlyists insist that only the 1611 edition is infallible, yet they are actually using a 1769 revision.
10. The cultic nature of KJV Onlyism is a mark that delineates their legalistic teaching as straying from the pure teaching of devotion to Christ and love of others.

The matter in a nutshell is this: Walking with God has nothing to do with using the correct Bible version. Indeed, there is no correct version. There are good versions and some not so good. They are all good enough to bring you to Christ and help you grow in grace. If one prefers the KJV, that is a personal choice. People should not be harangued over what version they prefer. Scripture makes it clear (in every

version) that the Kingdom of God is not a matter of rules and legalistic arguments.

“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” (Romans 14:17)

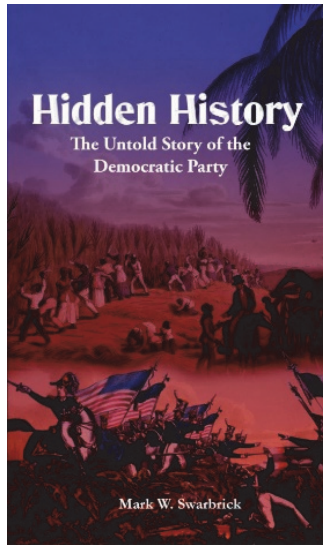
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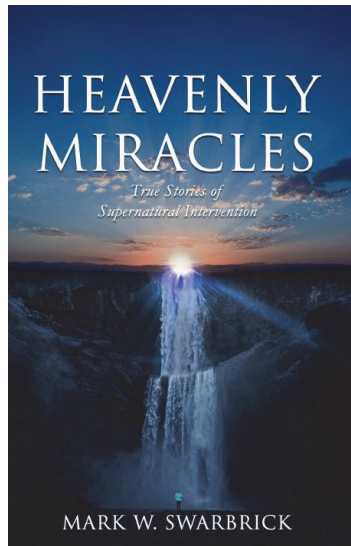


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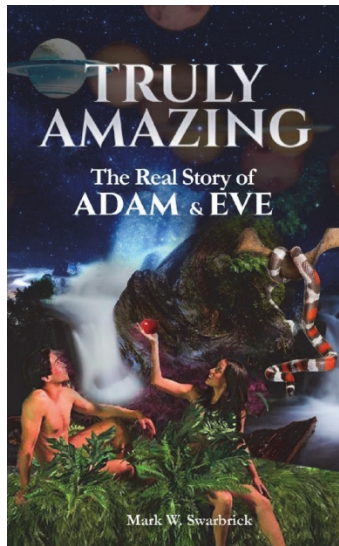


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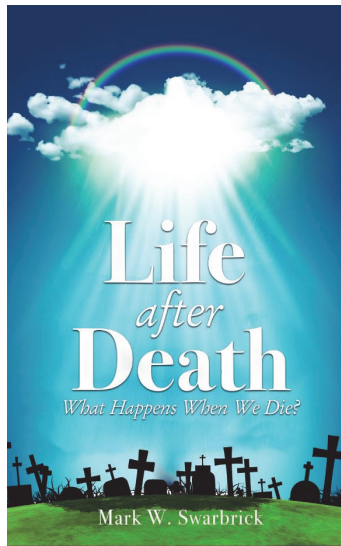


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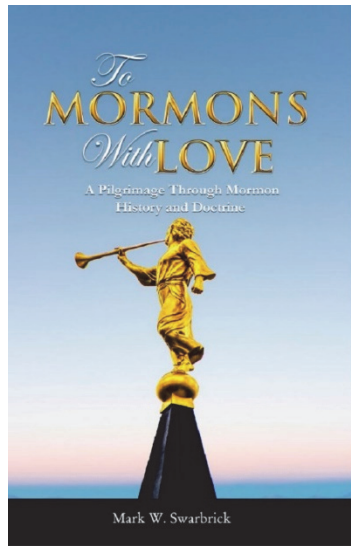
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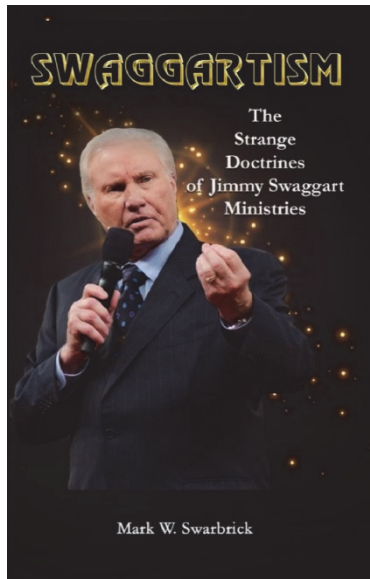
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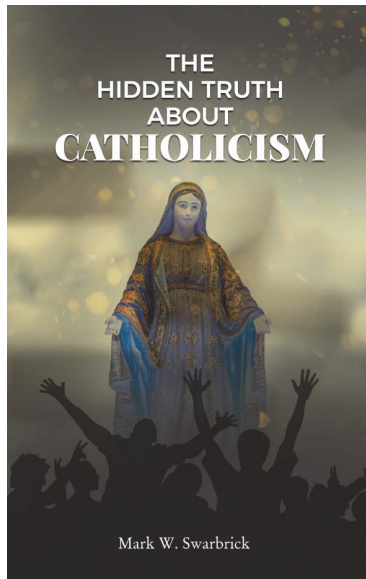
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