

## **Authorised but not Authoritative**

### ***Thought for the Day***

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The continuing argument on both sides of the border about higher education funding reminds me of my trade union days. When the Association of University Teachers first discussed strike action, the fact that this was unprecedented was deployed as an argument both for and against. Then, when another strike was proposed a couple of years later, someone objected that this time it wouldn't be unprecedented! I have to admit I couldn't resist pointing out that a second strike would indeed be unprecedented!

Well, the BBC this week is in a similar position. Next Monday, the whole of Radio 4 will be given over to reading the King James Bible (interrupted, of course, for such essentials as its daily visit to the Archers!). This may not be unprecedented – I well remember a whole day of Harry Potter – but it's still quite remarkable.

But then, so it was 400 years ago, when King James VI of Scotland, after he became James I of England and so of the United Kingdom, commissioned a committee of 50 scholars – not quite the 70 who translated the Hebrew Bible into the Greek version known as the Septuagint – to produce not quite the first English translation, but more a politically correct updating of existing versions.

And that really is the point I want to emphasise: The Authorised Version of 1611 may well be one of the masterpieces of the English language, but its translation was politically motivated, for example to support the Divine Right of Kings. When I was at university, students for the ministry had to study the original Hebrew, and, for Christians, the New Testament in Greek. Now few people know either, and we risk forgetting that the familiar text may be authorised, but it is not authoritative.

This isn't academic purism; something fundamental has been lost. If the king can commission a monarchist bible, why not one to fit our own prejudices? But that's back-to-front – the Bible sets standards; it shouldn't follow fashion. So however we enjoy its cadences, we should remember that any English Bible is the work of man, not of God.

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